

Peter A. Worthy

MYTHOS ONLINE

I

June 1997



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(editor)

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THE LOOKING GLASS

A round robin by
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I

Although priced above what was his usual limit, Trenton was very curious about the looking glass and was anxious to purchase it as a conversational piece for his new home. It was unusually octagonal in shape, the frame encasing it was of dark ebony and carved with strange markings that he couldn't quite make out, probably faded with age he assumed. The tag attached simply said. "Ebony Framed Looking Glass, circa. 17th Century." No other clue was forthcoming. It interested him. When he stared into the glass, Trenton thought he could just make out some kind of writing, but it was blurred and indistinct so he put it down to his imagination. There was nothing else in the dingy curio seller's that had caught his eye and so he approached the old man. "I want the looking glass on the side over there."

"I'm afraid it's part of a recent job lot, I only put it out so I could unpack the other items in the case for cataloguing. Anyway, the local museum has already offered me a good price for the whole lot. I'm sorry, was there anything else?" He asked apologetically. Trenton was fascinated with his find and was not about to be easily put off. "Look, whatever they've offered, I'll be happy to cover it, maybe better it. It's quite unusual and I really want it." The old man appeared to think it over. "It certainly is unusual, isn't it? As I said though, it is part of a job lot."

"What else is there?"

"Some manuscripts - bound and unbound - old books and a few letters. The museum have been most insistent about purchasing all the items and another case from the same place, mostly curios of a bizarre sort, certainly I've never seen their like before. The museum's offer has been more than generous." Trenton shrugged, if nothing else the other stuff could be used to liven up the sparsely ornamented house he had just bought. "Like I said, I'll better their offer. And I'd like the other case too." He could go over the contents of both cases in his own time, it would give him something to do. Ever since he'd arrived in England there had been a surplus of time on his hands, his inheritance had seen to that.

* * *

The cases were delivered to Trenton late that afternoon. He concentrated on finding a suitable place to hang the looking glass. After a couple of hours going through every inch of the house, he settled for above the mantel in the large upstairs library, to take advantage of the natural light. He also manoeuvred the cases in. Instead of going through the curios as he'd originally intended to do, Trenton resolved to do it in the morning as he was feeling somewhat exhausted, despite it having been an easy-going day. He walked up to the glass for a last satisfied look, peering intently into his reflection, again he experienced the odd notion that there was something lingering just beneath the surface.

A dizziness began to overcome Trenton, in fear of fainting he stumbled back awkwardly into a nearby chair. A fleeting impression formed in his mind, the image of an old, old man with a powerful force of will. He shook himself brusquely, the light-headed feeling slowly passed as did the momentary picture of the mysterious man. Confused and more than a little unsure of himself, Trenton concluded that he should take himself to bed for a night of restful sleep. It was his habit to read before going to sleep, but none of his usual books were to hand, so he reached into a packing case to see if there was anything to look over. The first thing

that came to hand was an untidy bundle of aged letters. Satisfied with these, Trenton went to his bedroom and browsed the first letter, all of which appeared to be in old English.

Jubal,

of ye matters concern'g us both, I did find ye formula in ye Confessions of ye Mad Monk Clianthus as yr advice indicat'd I would. I did compare it with ye formula given me by Saul, which he claims to have copied from ye Necronomicon of Phileas. As yr grow'g fear indicates there is much amiss. It hath prov'd likelie that yr caution was well advis'd, yet I have already cast ye Ritual. I know you possess a copy of Eibon's Booke, mayhap there is some help to be found therein?

I see now I should have shown more thought. Await'g yr answer.

Ethan Grey

Although unfamiliar with the names of the books mentioned, Trenton guessed that Jubal, Ethan and Saul were involved in some sort of sorcery, or at least believed they were. Intrigued, he made to read the next letter when he noticed writing on the reverse of the first in a different hand. It appeared to be some sort of informal journal entry.

Ethan,

Dear friend, did I not warn thee? I have gleam'd naught from ye Cthaat Aquadingen or Yergler's Chronike Von Nath. Saul is ye only one who doth possess copies of ye Necronomicon and Prinn's De Vermis Mysteriis - I dare not approach him as t'would alert him of my do'g. I must find someth'g lest Ethan be consum'd by some other. Khut-Nhah's Booke of Iod and Klarkash-Ton's Booke of Eibon contain sartain protections against Them from Outside, is it in them I shall find ye answer?

Trenton found himself becoming totally absorbed in the air of worried

haste conveyed by the note, obviously Jubal's he surmised. The man was certainly afraid for his friend, but who was Saul and where did he fit in to it? That something was going on was quite plain. He read on.

Old friend,

I have ponder'd much on Saul's origins of late. There is more to him than first appears, do you not find this so? I am sartain of it. Ye Testament of Carnamagos that he doth keep securely locked away hath given me pause for thought, does he live in ye shadow of ye Keeper of ye Dust, Quachil Uttaus? I know not. Yr references to Luveh-Keraphf's Black Rites hath afford'd potent protection for me, but for how long? Saul hath taught us almost all we know, though you have gone further than even he suspects. Is it but a matter of time for me? For us both?

Now more than ever, I need yr counsel Jubal.

It was clear that Saul was mistrusted by Jubal and definitely somewhat feared by Ethan, which was borne out in the next journal note that, as Trenton had expected, Jubal had penned on the back of his friend's missive.

I am ill at ease.

Rumour doth hint that Saul hath visited ye ruins of ye nefarious Chateau de Fausseflames. If so, what did he bear away with him? I have almost exhausted my sources, my latest acquisition, ye Liyuhh, hath prompt'd much worry'g thought. I fear more and more for Ethan and myself, Saul is indeed our Master in ye Elder Lore, yet I must not cease my efforts on Ethan's behalf.

More alarm'g. Saul did this very eve visit me. I concur with Ethan, there is more to Saul Webb than we at first believ'd. How did we get involv'd with him? We are as mice to him. What is his motive in all this? He complains that ye Trone Tables and ye Ethics of Ygor provide only part of the solution he seeks. He is still much

enthrall'd by Transmigration of ye body to dimensions beyond conception. He seeks my copy of ye Song of Yste. I was sore press'd to put him off, but did manage it at the last.

In his speech, he did let slip that he hath creat'd a gateway, but is loathe to test it without first perus'g ye Dirka volume, I believe he is much afear'd of ye Adumbrali or ye Hounds of Tindalos that ye Song of Yste doth warn of.

Trenton started to grow uncomfortable, it was becoming more apparent that something disquieting was going on two centuries ago, but what? Was the answer in the letters? Perplexed and uneasy, he continued to read, however he could find no more letters from Ethan. Instead there was an extract that Jubal had copied out at length from some unspecified source:

Strange was ye disappearance of one Ethan Grey, doctor to ye small community of Woadley not too distant from ye town of Redding. Grey was a widower, his young wife having pass'd away over a year ago, and had tak'n to walk'g of an even'g through ye Woods of Bull Marsh wherein rumour doth say a ruin'd manor does lie abandon'd. On this occasion, however, he did not return from his nocturnal wander'g. Assum'g ye good doctor did have business elsewhere none were at first duly worr'd, it be'g his habit to go travell'g at a moments notice. On ye third day, with still no sign of Mr. Grey and sore anxious after his health, some colleagues did visit his close friend, one Jubal Valpy of Redding.

Mr. Valpy declar'd he had no knowledge of any plan of Mr. Grey's to be away and did seem most concern'd for the doctor's well be'g. He return'd with his visitors to Woadley, whereupon he did organise a thorough search for Mr. Grey with no success. No mark was found, not a trace and t'was remark'd it was as if ye good Mr. Grey had vanish'd off ye face of ye Earth. Mr. Valpy did turn pale and was not'd to be awful brood'g and much agriev'd. He did stay for two more days, after which, resign'd, he did take up his th'gs

and depart never to return.

That very even'g a fire did break out in ye home of Ethan Grey and did burn ye place to its very ashes...

So Ethan had disappeared, "...*vanish'd off ye face of ye Earth.*", and his house had burned down not long after. Trenton flipped through the rest of the papers looking for some further note by Jubal which could explain what he believed had taken place, for Trenton was sure he would have some idea if not actually known. No note came to hand. He decided to go through the packing cases to see if any letter had come loose from the bundle, he was quite amazed. For every book mentioned in the correspondence was here, even those supposed to belong to Saul - assuming Jubal's sources had not gotten them for him from elsewhere. It was in the front of an aged, bound manuscript, *Black Rites*, that he found what he was looking for, only to be mystified more.

I have this day taken possession of Ethan's library. I would rather he was remember'd as ye noble man he was, and not revil'd as some foul sorcerer. I am truly lost. I feel no comfort in anyth'g. Not even in what I have done. I do not ask God for his forgiveness, for I am not a God-fear'g man. Perhaps that is my undo'g.

I have also tak'n up Saul's library, for he will have no further need of them. I have seal'd ye secret vaults beneath ye ruin that is Bull Marsh House, little wonder Saul chose to abide there. I have done what I can to efface any trace of ye evill of Saul Webb, but he is strong and not so easily contain'd.

I hope none disturb what I have set.

Jubal Valpy

So Jubal had taken Saul's books, but surely such a man as Saul was would not have been persuaded to part with them? "...*no further need of them.*"? What did he mean by "...*not even in what I have done.*" and "...*none disturb what I have set.*"? Obviously Jubal had done something

after the disappearance of Ethan, but what and why; and what of "...ye
evill of Saul Webb..."?



II. Something in Glass

Trenton started awake from a light doze as a stack of books and papers collapsed onto the floor. He shook his head to try and partially assuage his weariness. As far as he could see it was fruitless, his researches were getting him nowhere. He had managed to verify some of the external facts, i.e. the burning down of the manor, but the other pieces of the puzzle eluded him. The books were marvellous artefacts, there was no mistaking that, but he could make sense of none of them.

Most were written in obscure languages he knew nothing of, in alphabets he couldn't even begin to decipher. Even the ones in English, and there were a few, were written in such a dense, ancient dialect that they were impenetrable to his modern mind. He felt utterly frustrated, yet still determined to uncover the truth behind what had occurred. The occult had always fascinated him, and he knew the collection of books he had acquired was utterly priceless. He even felt a dim recognition at the sight of several of the titles. Several, he had no doubt, were titles which weren't even supposed to exist. And yet, here they were, stacked up in the front room of his house. It was difficult to believe his luck.

He turned to look at the mirror, which he had hung with pride of place on the wall to one side of the fireplace. It was the mirror that had guided him to this collection of treasures, though to him it was the greatest of the lot. He had taken to running his fingers along the dark ebony frame and trying to feel the underlying pattern which even in broad daylight seemed to hide most of its features. He was afraid of trying to clean it in case any damage was done, he knew how fragile antiques could be - a previous experience with an expensive painting made him wary.

Buttoning up his coat, Trenton decided he would try a different route of exploration. The local library was only a few minutes walk from his home and was an ideal place to carry out his research. Outside, the

weather was dull and rather cloudy, he pulled his collar up against a cutting wind and widened his stride as he attempted to shorten the distance to the library. He had to stop abruptly for a hearse which was pulling out of a road in front of him.

While he waited for it to leave the street he happened to glance inside and notice four elderly men grouped about an oak coffin. It was a sight he had seen frequently; the sight of a group of elderly family and friends accompanying a lost friend on their final journey. He was still young enough for it to seem a different world, a strange and distant world. He looked up at the grief stricken faces, the four thinly lipped mouths crossed with an aspect mingling hope and despair. He was shocked to notice the fourth was the man from the curio shop who had sold him the items. He made a mental note to look him up again, it might help if he knew where the man had bought the lot. Then the hearse pulled away and he was free to continue his journey to the library.

Inside it was warm and welcoming, a relief from the world outside. He unbuttoned his coat and moved to the section on occultism, planning to look up the significance of mirrors. There had to be a reason why the mirror had been included in the lot, and he wanted an explanation for the apparition of the old man he had witnessed.

A few hours later he was feeling much happier, and was sure now that he was beginning to get somewhere. A mirror, he had read, had often been used in the past as a focus for spells. They could also act as gateways for energies; or, and this was something he couldn't quite make sense of, as a messenger. He had remembered reading something about a gateway in one of the letters. Could the looking glass he had acquired be the gateway Saul Webb had managed to conjure up? Could he have taken a perfectly normal looking glass and imbued it with magical energy? Was that the attraction that always drew Trenton himself back to the mirror? A large part of him wanted to scoff, deny all these 'facts' as nonsense and go back to his ordinary life.

But these feelings were overwhelmed by a feeling of intense excitement,

the fact that he was close to something that eclipsed the narrow confines of conventional reality. Pleased with his research he decided that rather than going straight back home, he would take a detour and visit the curio seller. It wasn't too far out of his way and the funeral would surely be over by now. A bell above the door tinkled to signal his arrival. Baxter looked up at him blankly and then recognition alit his features. "Hello, Mr. Trenton. Is there anything I can do for you?" Trenton looked at Baxter and said. "I was just curious where you obtained the items I purchased from you last week."

"That's funny, you aren't the only one to ask after those items recently. An elderly gentleman was in here yesterday, seemed quite distraught that the items had sold. He wanted your address, but naturally I didn't give it to him. The names and addresses of my customers are confidential information. Which is why I am unable to tell you where I bought them."

"Oh well. Do you know who the man was?" The curio seller shook his head. "Never seen him before in my life. Though, funnily enough, I'm sure I spotted him at a funeral I attended today."

"I saw you in the hearse earlier today."

"Did you? It was for the man who had been purchasing the items for the museum. I knew him slightly. It's a shame, he seemed fit as a fiddle when I spoke to him last. Apparently he had some kind of seizure and fell down a staircase." Baxter drew closer and lowered his voice as if afraid he would be overheard. "They say he had just passed a mirror and acted as if he'd seen something terrifying." There was little left to say, so after a few more moments of polite conversation Trenton headed back towards home. The light was beginning to fade from the world, and as he walked the dusk quickly faded to darkness.

When he arrived at his front door he struggled for a few moments to find the lock with his key, the street light should have aided him, but the bulb appeared to have blown. He would have to ring the council about that

sometime. Inside, his house seemed unusually cold and he actually considered lighting a fire; even though it had been a couple of months since he had last needed to. Still, there was a stack of coal left by the fire and there was no harm in using it. So, when he finally unbuttoned his coat and relaxed back on his chair, it was before a blazing fire. He felt rather tired. The day had seemed to stretch out to incredible lengths, compounded by the fact he was suffering from lack of sleep. He looked up at the looking glass, still hanging beside the fireplace, and thought he noticed something strange.

He had looked at the mirror countless times from where he was sitting, yet now the view of the room it afforded him seemed slightly lilted, as if the mirror had been moved. No, even that wouldn't explain it, it was as if the glass had become slightly warped while he was out. He stood up and walked over to look at it, pulling it away from the wall and examining it closely. There was no change as far as he could see: the looking glass still appeared to be in perfect condition. Puzzled, he set it back on its hook and moved back to his chair and sat down again. There was still something wrong with the view he received of the room.

Trenton was about to continue his investigations when a telephone call interrupted him. He raised himself from the chair and walked over to pick up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Mr. Trenton. You have some things which belong to our family, we would be willing to buy them back. At a generous price."

"Look, who are you?"

"That does not matter. We do need these things back rather urgently, and as I said, we would be willing to pay well."

"Would you? What if I didn't want to sell?"

"That would be your decision, and one you would have to live by. We did have a deal with the museum in Reading who were going to retrieve the artefacts for us, but alas they failed in their part of the agreement."

With these words the image of the hearse pulling away down the street formed in Trenton's consciousness. He wondered if there was a connection. "We will give you a few days to reconsider."

"And then what?"

"Then we shall have to see..." The voice replied in what was clearly a thinly veiled threat. There was a new element in the voice which filled him with fear, it had sounded almost inhuman. Before he could answer the line went dead. Trenton almost dropped the receiver back into its cradle. He could see himself in the mirror across the room, he looked deathly pale. There was something very wrong here, he made an immediate decision, picking up the phone he grabbed the telephone directory and looked up Baxter's Curios. The number was there and he dialled. He allowed the phone to ring a couple of dozen times, but there was no answer. He felt an increasing sense of unease.

Trenton knew Baxter lived in a flat above his shop and that he had made no mention of going out. In fact, in the last few minutes of their conversation, he had mentioned that he intended to spend the evening pricing some recent additions. Perhaps he had taken an early night, or even just popped out for a few minutes. That had to be it.

Despairing of what to do, Trenton decided to throw himself back into a study of the books. There had to be something in them, something he could make sense of. For a while he was as lost as he had been before, then suddenly a pattern began to emerge. Perhaps he was now in a different frame of mind, one which was more open to what was written down. Whatever the explanation, he found himself becoming increasingly uneasy as his reading drew him deeper and deeper into a morass of ancient interlocking myths. If, as he assumed, Jubal and the others had believed themselves involved in some sorcerous experimentation, then there was a large body of belief stretching far back into the past which validated what they did; or if not validated, at least suggested their actions had a background in the accepted wisdoms of the time.

An understanding of what they desired to achieve formed in his mind, as well as Ethan and Jubal's reasons behind deserting Saul. They had realised that Saul had his origins in other than the human spheres; that he was a member of a group known only as the Dark Brotherhood, a sect shrouded in mystery which even the books Trenton had before him threw little light on. It was assumed that this group had religious origins, but several of the treatises hinted at extraterrestrial origins. He thought of the man on the phone, who spoke for a family; was it an actual family or merely a spiritual one? Could this sect he had read about have survived down through the generations? If so, then why did they need the objects back? It could be because of Saul Webb.

He recalled the image of the old, old man he had seen in the mirror and suddenly jumped to a conclusion. Jubal had done something to Saul, that much he knew. Saul had also been working on some sort of gateway, there had to be a connection. Trenton stood up and walked over to the looking glass, as he gazed into its depths he was sure for a moment that his image wavered. This was the revenge extracted by Jubal on Saul, he was sure of it. He had turned the gateway back on its creator, thrown Saul through it and locked it behind him. The answer had to be in the looking glass. He lifted it once again from its hook and turned it in his hands. The ebony frame was backed with a solid oak base, which like the glass was inlaid in the frame. Then he noticed the minute catch almost hidden by the finely carved frame, he couldn't believe he had missed it, having examined the looking glass many times.

Trenton flicked the catch and a circle of oak about six inches in diameter came open to reveal a circle of ebony. There was an octagonal etching and four metal disks, one placed at every other point of the octagon. Each of these also held etchings. He couldn't quite see what was marked on them, so he teased them out onto the palm of his hand. One was plainly iron, the others gold, silver and possibly bronze. They were each marked with a plain illustration of an octopus or jellyfish, Trenton wasn't sure which, encircled with runic writing. He closed the circular hatch and there was no trace that it had ever been there - it was so finely disguised. He hung the looking glass back on the wall, keeping the disks

in his hand.

A moment later he was clutching his arms and wondering why it had suddenly grown cold. His vision too had begun to blur, but no, he saw it was the mirror image that was blurring. His vision was fine. The image of the room began to move, started a slow rotation and Trenton felt himself transfixed. He couldn't move, it were as if he were suffering from sleep paralysis, the image of the revolving room held him and as the revolutions increased in speed, the image began to change. It was no longer his room, no longer anything which offered any vestige of familiarity. Suddenly a phrase rushed through his mind. "*I hope none disturb what I have set.*" He thought of the metal disks which now resided in his cold palms. He cursed himself for what he had been stupid enough to do, and as the gateway began to open he saw he what was waiting for him on the other side. A warm fetid smell rushed out to meet him, as did the caresses of a humid wind which gradually, yet assuredly drew him forward...



III. The Servant of Quachil Uttaus

Trenton found himself standing upon a dusty plain that stretched off into the distance. He assumed what it did for his vision was somewhat obscured by the thin, swirling mist that surrounded him and touched him with its warm, moist caress. It wasn't thin enough that he could identify the dark shapes that flitted about in the mist. They didn't seem to come any closer to him, but the fetid smell that must originate with the shapes did reach him. It was such a putrid smell that he started gagging and coughing. After a few minutes he got himself under control -- or the smell wasn't as strong as it was before.

He took a few tentative steps forward, noticing that the dust was inches thick, completely obscuring his feet. He looked behind him and the sameness of the terrain overwhelmed him. He didn't know where he was and didn't know in which direction he should go. Maybe he should stay right where he was, but for what reason?

Slumping down into a sitting position in the thick dust, with his arms resting on his knees, Trenton took his head in his hands. As he opened his hands and placed them on the sides of his head, the metal disks he had been holding dropped into the thick dust between his knees.

"What have I done?" he moaned aloud to the emptiness. "And what am I going to do?"

He thought back over everything that he had done since he had acquired the looking glass. As far as he could reflect, he doubted if he would have done anything differently, even if he could have. He was just an innately curious man, one who couldn't have resisted reading the letters and delving into the strange, old books. And, now, he was here . . . but where was "here"?

"Don't make any sudden moves," a gravelly voice came to him out of the mists.

He looked up and all around him seeing nothing. He faced back forward to see a dark shape in the mist before him, which became more distinct as time passed until there was a man standing a few feet before him.

Trenton got to his feet and looked at the man. It was the same man that he had thought he had seen in the mirror! The old man. Why was he here? Where exactly were they? Inside the mirror? Someplace else?

"I'm ...," he began.

"I know. You are Mr. Trenton. And I am Saul Webb. You know of me from the letters, but what you have read about me is not necessarily the truth."

"How do you know what I have read?"

"I am aware of everything that is in view of the looking glass . . . since its creation.

"Jubal, Ethan, and I were all members of the Dark Brotherhood, a 'family' devoted to bringing Quachil Uttaus, the Treader of the Dust, through the dimensions to earth, so that we could serve the Master while everything else ages and turns to dust.

"I can see the puzzlement on your face. It is too complicated to explain why someone would want to be alive with nothing but dust around him. And I can see that you are also wondering why I haven't aged -- since the 17th Century -- and turned to dust. When one becomes a member of the Dark Brotherhood, one is enshrouded, through a ritual, with the substance of the Master's dimension that keeps one from aging. On earth it seems to only prolong the human life-span by about fifty percent. But here in the Master's dimension, the aging process is completely halted. That is why I am still alive, and Jubal and Ethan are now dead and turned to dust. No, you won't become as me . . . unless you stay here

long enough for the structure of your body to change."

"You mean that I can go back?" Trenton blurted out.

"Yes, but only if I perform the ritual of gate passing. And I won't do that unless you assist me in an endeavor on the other side," Webb replied.

"What do you want me to do? I'll do anything to go back." "Destroy the looking glass."

Trenton couldn't believe that his passage back to earth would be at such a small price.

"Why would I want to do that?"

"To destroy the gateway. I was going to destroy the looking glass, back in my time -- the 17th Century, but Ethan entered my house just before I had returned from a meeting of the Dark Brotherhood. He removed the disks from the back of the looking glass and hid in a closet. When I entered my home and glanced at the glass, I was sucked through the gateway (as you were). Ethan came out of the closet and placed the metal disks in the back of the looking glass so that I couldn't come back through the gateway. I have been here ever since. I can't go back now because of how my body structure has changed. But you still can."

"But what about the Dark Brotherhood," Trenton asked. "They killed the man from the museum and Baxter, the owner of the curio shop."

"I know. But they only did that because those two thwarted their mission of reacquiring the looking glass and the books."

"Buy why wouldn't they kill me when they find out that I have destroyed the looking glass?"

"They'll think that the manner of creating the glass is in the books which you have. What they won't know is that I destroyed the book that told how to create the looking glass/gateway after creating the glass. At the

time I did not know why I destroyed the book, but after being here in the Master's dimension, I know that I am privy to all of the secrets the looking glass has been an observer to, all through the ages. And because I can exert a small modicum of control through the gateway, I apparently placed the seed in my own mind in the 17th Century that the book must be destroyed. I know that sounds slightly obscure."

"Why didn't you just destroy the gateway?"

"Once the looking glass was created, the Master could have cared less about the means of creating it, but his influence would have prevented my telling myself to destroy it. As it was, I came to that conclusion on my own and destroyed the book."

"But getting back to the Dark Brotherhood," Trenton interjected, "wouldn't they still want to kill me when they realize that they don't have the right book?"

"It will take them generations to translate a few of the books that are in languages that only I knew. The Brotherhood has never had access to them, so they are unaware that they needed to know those languages and were unable to prepare for the eventuality of coming into possession of the books.

"But, come, it is time for you to return. You mustn't stay here much longer or your body structure will begin to change."

Webb placed his hands on Trenton's shoulders and began reciting the ritual that would return Trenton back through the gateway. As he finished the ritual, he added, "Goodbye, my friend."

* * *

Trenton opened his eyes and saw that he was back in his room. A

sense of relief flowed into his being. He looked around himself to find that everything seemed normal. Then he walked over to the mantel and

took the looking glass down. Holding it in his hands, he said, "Goodbye, Saul Webb. May your soul find peace, wherever and whenever you are."

And then he dropped the looking glass, which hit the floor and shattered into innumerable shards.

"Oops!"

As he looked at the wreckage of the looking glass on his floor, thinking about how he would best clean it up, he watched the shards of glass liquefy and dissolve into nothingness. And the black ebony frame dried and flaked, leaving a small pile of dust, which disappeared with the draft from an open window.

Trenton walked over to the window and looked out on his normal world. As normal as it could be, knowing that some of the myths in this world were actual fact. He shuddered once, before deciding to get something to eat. He would need his energy to pack up the books for his soon-to-arrive visitors. He smiled to himself, knowing that their plans had been thwarted by Saul Webb and himself.



IV. Reflections of Dust and Death

The doorbell rang just after nightfall. Trenton took a last lingering look at the packing cases, wondering if he had forgotten anything, then went to answer the door. He was totally unprepared for the bulky onrushing figure which barrelled into him, sending him crashing unconscious to the floor.

When he awoke he found he was bound tightly to a chair in the centre of the room in his upstairs library. In the meagre, flickering light cast from the fireplace he could make out a figure standing directly before him. From what he could see, it was swaddled in a flowing cloak-like overcoat with a broad-brimmed hat. The face was mostly covered up, perhaps by a handkerchief, and dark glasses served to obscure the rest of the countenance. He could hear two or three others moving about the house, apparently searching for something. Then the figure bent low to him, directly before his face, and spoke.

"Ah, Mr. Trenton, you're awake." The figure began. "We meet at last." He knew that voice; the sombre resonant tones, the oddly hollow timbre.

"You. You're..." Trenton began. The figure drew abruptly upright with a flourish of flapping movement. "Ah, I see you recognise me. Correct, Mr. Trenton, I spoke to you earlier on the telephone. We had some business to attend to...for the family." From what he could make out of the face of his antagonist beneath the gauzy cloth, it appeared that the colour of the skin was dusky, perhaps deeply-tanned like that of an Arab or Indian.

It was also deeply pitted, but there was no trace of an accent whatsoever in the strangely resonant voice. The man spoke the Queen's English as well as himself. "The Dark Brotherhood...!" Trenton finally coughed out. This seemed to stun the figure. "You've heard of the Brotherhood?"

It reached into its robes and drew forth a wicked-looking, gilt ceremonial knife, which it branded in Trenton's face. "What else do you know, my unfortunate friend?" Just then another figure entered the room, a bullish looking man in dark clothes like those of the cult leader. But where the leader's clothes were loose fitting, the second man was so large, the clothes so tight on him that Trenton had to wonder that he could even move. Surely this was the man who had knocked him senseless in the foyer! "Master." Began the second man in a deep, gravelly voice which surely befit his looks. "We got the books, letters and the like, but we can't find it!" A hard slap across the face nearly rocked Trenton and the chair to the floor. "Where is it?" Hissed the leader."

A sudden dust cloud seemed to well up where the gloved hand had connected with him, sending Trenton into uncontrollable coughing for a moment. "What?" He finally asked when the fit had subsided.

"The glass!" The figure nearly shouted, the hollow voice rising in pitch to a nerve racking whine. "Oh, that..." Replied Trenton with a false bravado he was able to muster only with great effort. Why were these men attacking him? He had been assured by Saul Webb himself that they wouldn't. Suddenly a grin lit upon Trenton's face like that of the proverbial cat that had eaten the canary. "It won't do you any good, y'know. I destroyed the looking glass."

"You what!" Choked the leader of the Dark Brotherhood, for the first time that evening the arrogance seemed to leave his gaunt frame, replaced by...was that? Yes! Fear. "Where...where are the disks?" The voice trembling now. "Buried in the dust of that hellish dimension of dust." Trenton was chuckling now, nearly aloud. He was afraid, sure, but he was also enjoying this. "Bloody hell!" Ejaculated the big man. "You fool! Do you realise what you have done?" Two more men in loose robes had entered the room now, obviously drawn by the shouting. "Yes." Answered Trenton steadily. "I've destroyed the gateway to the dust-dimension of your awful god. So you lot might just as well pack it in right now, because torturing me all you like will avail you naught!"

"No." Sighed the cult leader. "You don't understand. The looking glass wasn't the gateway...it was the *lock*. It barred the way to the dust dimension of Quachil Utaaus. And more importantly, it served to keep Saul Webb and his evil imprisoned therein."

B...b...but." Stammered Trenton. "But I met Saul in that terrible place. He's a kindly old, innocent man. Isn't he?" He pleaded. "Saul Webb is neither innocent, nor a man." And with that the figure proceeded, in it's queer, hollow voiced way, to relate the tale of what had truly begun, its ramifications echoing even up to the present day, three centuries ago.

* * *

Ethan Grey, Jubal Valpy and Saul Webb, all friends and would-be sorcerers, strove mightily, searching thoroughly in those hallowed, forbidden tomes passed down from ages immemorial. What were they searching for? Ethan and Saul, why nothing less than the very secret of immortality. As for Jubal, they never really knew. Setting themselves up in a makeshift laboratory in the secret vaults beneath an abandoned manor house in Bull Marsh, lying between the village of Woadley and the town of Redding, here they performed hellish experiments and communed with strange gods, all to no avail. Eventually, moving out of the house and into the world proper, find the secret they did, by way of the Dark Brotherhood. The Dark Brotherhood was an ultra-secret organisation, moreover a secret society along the lines of the Knights Templar, or the Bavarian Illuminati; dedicated to the service of the dark god Quachil Utaaus of the Great Old Ones from the stars, else known under the epithet the Treader of the Dust.

In exchange for his unholy worship, of which details the leader seemed loathe to revel to Trenton, even though he would probably never leave the room alive, the god bestowed upon certain of his flock the secret of longevity, and even immortality...but the latter was *only* for the truly faithful, those who would dare dwell with their god in his realm of dust. At any rate, the Treader of the Dust was a fearsome god, not wholesome to even speak of, and Jubal and Ethan preferred to worship their god

from afar rather than at its very feet; indeed, they feared direct communion with Quachil Uttaus. Instead, they chose to deal with the god's avatar here on Earth, known in elder Aegypt as Ka-Rath, the Keeper of the Dust. All the same, the boon of longevity was theirs to be had for the taking.

Saul Webb on the other hand, long having been driven near to the brink of madness, his thirst for power pushing him to dare go even further in his unholy studies than the others, calling upon not the lesser demons of the Cabalistic arts but the greater; even those aforementioned Great Old Ones themselves! Saul took it upon himself to venture directly to that terrible god's dust realm, there to worship in the dust at Quachil Uttaus' very feet. To this end, and at first unbeknownst to his colleagues and former friends - but not for long, for Jubal's enigmatic contacts informed him - Saul journeyed to reportedly haunted ruins in France, in a place called Averaigne, and there learned the formula for constructing a gateway to take him to this horrid, blasted realm, and he established this gateway in his mind, thereby activated by his own sheer force of will! Of course, Ethan and Jubal were now all but neglected by Saul, and had no idea just how far his mania extended. Indeed, it was Saul's wish and plan to bring Quachil Uttaus to Earth by way of his gateway, to have the god blast it utterly and make of this planet a terrible twin of its own dust realm!

Setting this terrible plan into motion, Saul took it upon himself to move back into the secret vaults beneath the manor house in the depths of Bull Marsh, wherein the three friends had first begun their hellish apprenticeships to entities beyond sane imagining. Meanwhile, Jubal Valpy began to make his unexplained journeys abroad, unaware of Saul's return or intent. It was not long before Ethan, now a successful doctor, although still dedicated to the arcane disciplines, learned of the machinations of the by now more malicious Saul. Ethan took up those unwholesome volumes and entered into a pact with a foul death god, once again of the ranks of those daemoniac Great Old Ones, the charnel lord called Mordiggian. Petitioning for aid in the forestalling of the malign influence of Saul Webb, Ethan was given the means for constructing a

lock - the looking glass - with which to trap and imprison the unwitting wizard. When next Saul was due to journey yet again via his outre gateway, to the dustland of Quachil Utaus, there to commence the preparations that would pave the way to Earth for his foul god, Ethan Grey journeyed to the manor house and hid himself in a closet. As Saul yet again strangely vanished from the face of the Earth, Ethan emerged from hiding and drew before him the looking glass and the disk mechanisms.

Placing the disks upon the outer edges of the glass face, and inserting them there by lowering the outer ring, he thus stranded Saul Webb in the dust realm on the other side of the gateway. This done, Ethan then prepared to meet the price of the charnel deity Mordiggian. In an effort to spare his surviving friend the knowledge of his dire fate, he affected his disappearance. Jubal had returned, and learning of his friend's disappearance, and sensing too the fate of Saul, went into action. He journeyed to the manor house in Bull Marsh, the last known dwelling of Saul Webb, and carried away the dark mage's books and sealed the vaults beneath the manor and torched the place. He then went to Woadley, searched for Ethan in vain, then took possession of his library too. In an effort to hide the signs of his late friend's sorcery from prying eyes, Jubal again took up the torch and razed the house to the ground.

* * *

It was an incredible tale, thought Trenton, steeped in sorcery and demonology of the darkest sort. But it did bear out what he had read in the letters. So Saul had duped him, but to what end? To coerce him into destroying the lock and help him escape from that terrible realm of dust? But certain things yet needed adding up. "You say the gateway is in Saul's mind." He began, trying hard to grasp the situation at hand. "That the looking glass never was the gateway, but actually the lock? What, then, pulled me into that dust realm when I removed the disks?" Again, the cult leader explained patiently, as if ministering to a child. "Saul Webb himself pulled you through, with his mind. Remember, I said sheer willpower. Removing the disks was purely coincidental to the

moment, although I suppose that he couldn't have pulled you in had the disks been in place, the lock had been closed."

Trenton thought back, to the murders of the unfortunate museum man and of Baxter, the curio shop owner. "W...why did you kill the man from the museum, and Baxter? Saul said it was because they had thwarted your plans to regain your occult property."

"Wrong, Mr. Trenton." Corrected the leader. "We did not kill those two. He did. Think about it, the first man was struck down before a mirror, a mirror which served as a temporary window of opportunity for Saul Webb. Surely, there are many such windows in time and space...the looking glass is not the first one...nor the last.

"I suspect Baxter was killed in a similar way. As to why they were killed, perhaps it was to intrigue you, Mr. Trenton. To involve you further in this whole affair, so that you could be coerced into helping Saul Webb by destroying the dimensional seal. Again, Mr. Trenton, think about it. Would you have believed the letters, if not for the murders?" No, he thought, probably not. And he wouldn't have found himself so intrigued by the looking glass either. Sure, he would still have bought it, for it was a remarkable artifact. but he would merely have hung it upon his wall and that would've been that. It was the subtle piecing together of the clues which had appealed to him.

"Well." Began Trenton slowly. "Even though you didn't kill those two men, I suppose you'll kill me now." Was it his imagination, or was the dust getting thicker in here? The cult leader chuckled softly. "Correct, Mr. Trenton. I'm afraid you know too much." He again drew forth the dagger and raised it above his head. "Wait! Stop!" Cried Trenton, desperately stalling for time. "I don't know everything. What about you? How do you know these affairs of so long ago so well?" He picked his mind for more questions, in order to forestall his own doom. "I suppose you'll tell me that your order is a thorough one, that the secrets have been passed down through the ages, but..."

"No, Mr. Trenton, I will not tell you that." He lowered the knife again, an action echoed in Trenton's sigh of relief. "But do not tell me, Mr. Trenton, you have not guessed? Do you not sense the truth? I do indeed know the story firsthand, for you see, Mr. Trenton, Mordiggian's price wasn't actually death, as you may have surmised. Rather a sort of *living death*, an eternity trapped in a corpse-like shell. How do I know the events of three hundred years ago so thoroughly? Why simply because I...", a flurry of the robes and the figure threw them off and doffed hat and glasses. An overpowerign charnel stentch arose from somewhere. "Am Ethan Grey!" The sight before Trenton, tattered and shrivelled and worm-eaten, filled him with horror. Such a thing shouldn't move, shouldn't speak, should not be alive! Trenton choked back the horror, the nausea, the sheer madness! "B...but..." Choked Trenton after long moments of silence, but he didn't know just what to say.

"If...if the lock is destroyed, the gateway open, then where... where is Saul Webb?" He coughed some more, yes it was definitely becoming more dusty in here! Almost on cue the mocking laughter sounded. It seemed to emanate from nowhere, and yet it obviously came from somewhere. Accompanying it came the sound of heavy footfalls, again from some unfathomable point in space. "He's freed Saul Webb!" Shrieked the Dark Brotherhood brethren almost in unison. The laughter continued on, and began to ascend into a monstrous, ear-splitting crescendo. Too, the ponderous footfalls sounded on, becoming louder and moe massive with every foundation shaking step. In concert with the sounds came little puffs of dust, dancing rhythmically upon the air.

"Wrong!" Coughed the thing that had been Ethan Grey, as the dust began to choke the throat and lungs of all in attendance, and as their nostrils began to plug with dirt. "He has freed the body of Saul Webb, but in that shell now walks Quachil Uttaus! The Treader of the Dust!" And it wasn't very long before the room, the house, the very neighbourhood became chock-full of grit and grime and *dust*.

AT DEATH'S DOOR, DREAMING

Ian Davey

Prologue:
An Uncredited Extract
from a journal found during March
on the London Underground

Daylight today doesn't seem quite as bright as it should, the sun seems to have lost its lustre and I am tired. Perhaps by setting down these words I am sharing my guilt, lessening its deadening weight on my soul. A weight which threatens to overwhelm me even before the truth of the horror which I must recount. I am a betrayer, a betrayer of everything I ever held dear. Selfishness clouded my judgement and now everyone will suffer; either that or I am insane. Were it only so.

My failure lies in that I failed to abide by what I have considered the most sacred vows of my life; the ones I uttered to my wife on the day of our wedding. Not the facile ceremonials, but the underlying truth behind them. She was suffering and I turned my back on her - worse - I went against her, and was all too happy to see her finally locked away. Her sensitivity had sheltered me on many occasions, yet when it came her time to reach out for me; the time when she needed me the most, I turned my head in disgust. Yes, I have a lot to be ashamed about, and Helen has every reason to hate me. It was a breakdown that caught me by surprise, and I found myself unable to cope. One day she was fine, the next... It was beyond the scope of anything I could deal with. Gradually things grew worse, it became more than just a breakdown. She was plagued by nightmares and delusions, her behaviour became increasingly psychotic. And then, I regret to say, I had her admitted to

an institution.

She had tried to speak to me, but I wouldn't listen, I saw mental illness and it frightened me. Scared me out of my wits. There was no support on offer, no one I felt I could turn to, so I just let her go.

So she disappeared from my life, and though I am ashamed to write this, at the time I was glad. I forgot her, blanked her from my life, rewrote my history as if she had never existed. And so it went on. Three years later they released her. Not because she was 'cured', rather through the 'Care in the Community' program. With drugs and support she could become a useful member of society again. I wasn't ready to have her back, not in that state, and the drugs were forthcoming but the support was not. What else could I have expected?

I put up with her for weeks - listen to me, so arrogant - before I made the decision that I wish I had made three years before. I sat and listened to her. She told me of her collapse, of what occurred on the day it took place, and gradually the truth came out.

It took me a while but now I understand. Helen's breakdown did not originate from within herself, it wasn't the result of emotional stress or an inability to cope with her life. Rather, it was something closer to an assault. A mind, floating somewhere in the future had sought and found the avenue provided by her great sensitivity. It was, she explained to me, as if her consciousness had been torn out by the roots and supplanted by another. She was flooded by a barrage of tightly packed images, a few weeks of someone's life passed into her over a matter of seconds and her mind had been unable to take the strain. For the duration of her breakdown her mind had been fighting against the transplanted thoughts; pushing against them and turning her waking life into a montage of confusions. Gradually though, as she recovered, she pieced the images together slowly. Making of them something approaching coherency. So when I was finally ready to listen she could tell me the story of this future person's life as easy as if it had happened to her. In effect it has; though this is not my wife's story, not a fabrication of her mind, neither

is it mine. I offer it here in good faith, so treat it as you will, for I fear it doesn't really matter what you think.

I. A Story Presents itself

I was a reporter, had been for years, still looking for that one big story that would push me into the big time. I had been searching for this story for so long that I was beginning to doubt it existed, at least for me. I had started with big aspirations. I was going to change things, but it quickly feel apart. I've had big breaks, but always find myself in the second rank. Perhaps it was because I had given up looking for that the story came looking for me. It came as a rumour at first, a tale of an artist living a secluded life somewhere in the country. He was apparently working on something big, his masterpiece, but no one had seen it and no one would see it until his death. The rumour was a fascinating one, but something I didn't really have time to dwell on, so I let it drift to the back of my mind. There was something about it that hooked me, even then, but I didn't really have an inkling of the fact until several days later...

I had woken up in a cold sweat after a fearful nightmare. Something unusual for me, my nights were rarely interrupted by any kind of night terror. It was so fragmentary, increasingly so as time went on, and I could only recall certain aspects. I had been walking through an everchanging landscape, looked down upon by a gigantic artist who was painting the land around me. I could not flee him, for he painted obstacles in my way, as well as strange nightmarish figures which followed me ceaselessly. I was frightened, but angry as well, and in my flight I called up at him, cursed him in languages my waking mind had no awareness of. I threatened him with death, oblivion, and he laughed; for he was already dead. Though dead he could still torment me. A flick of his brush and another nightmare appeared, a slithering figure with thousands of complex, intertwining legs. My flight was hopeless, I could not escape from that thing, and moments later it had me. As did my sudden escape into the cold light of day.

I realized the source of the nightmare, it was based on the rumour I had heard. Maybe my journalistic instincts were finally kicking in, shouting at me that this was going to be something, something very big. The story that would finally make me a big name. My usual doubts nagged at me but I set them aside. It was time I went out on a limb, and if this came to nothing then so be it - there would be other chances.

I cursed myself now for the exceptional amount of alcohol I had imbibed the night I first heard the rumour. I knew I had heard it from a paparazzi, and an almost familiar face hovered at the edge of my mental vision. But it was no good, the party was too obscured in my memory. Jackie was there, she would know who. He was a strictly second-rate paparazzi I knew that, I would have remembered him more easily otherwise. So I rang Jackie, a freelance who'd helped me out a couple of times. We were friends, or as close as you can get to being friends in our business. I'd tipped her off a while back, and she owed me a few favours. I could just call her and see if she knew the paparazzo's name. She was out when I rang first, so I left a message on her answering machine and waited for her to call back. I had time, I typed out the story I'd been working on before the party had put it on hold, and kept occupied until ten when the phone rang. It was Jackie and she reeled off the number virtually off the top of her head. I thanked her profusely and offered to buy her a drink at some point.

So, anyway, I rang Karl, and he was in. He agreed to repeat to me what he had said at the party, provided I do him a favour in return. I agreed reluctantly, he probably wanted me to help flog a couple of photos from last night to our Gossip columnist, though I can't think what he could have got of interest amongst the small fry on the night of the party. Once the bartering was out of the way he repeated what he'd told me last night. "There's this artist guy called Griswold, Gingrich or something like that. He lives in this fortress of a house in Devon, has been in a coma for months, yet he claims to be working on some great piece of art, but get this. No one will see it 'til he's dead, in fact, it won't really exist until he's dead. And get this, he don't get paid until he's dead either, what an idiot, hell, he's probably rolling in it anyway."

That was the gist of it, if my journalistic instincts had it right, I was supposed to track down some loony, half-dead artist living in Devon; for a start it was miles away, and secondly, I don't really know where I could start looking for this 'artist'. He may not even exist. I was beginning to feel a bit stupid, but I was sure there was a story in this - somewhere. When I look back now, it feels as if somehow I was fated to track down this mysterious, solitary figure. That whatever I did, I was drawn back to this same path. When I'd rang Karl I'd expected more details, like "...in Devon," isn't quite as precise as I had hoped. Sitting, pondering this, a phone call had interrupted me, and picking it up I found the features editor from my newspaper on the other end. This time the facile man had decided the newspaper needed a bit of 'culture' to show it had some class.

Naturally it was more the controversy surrounding the art than the art itself he was interested in. He'd asked me if I remembered the bloke who put dead sheep in boxes, and I'd said yes, so he told me that this bloke went one better and wanted me to get down there as quickly as possible. Someone had already been there and taken loads of snaps, I just had to have a look and write something suitably horrified and scathing; the 'art as an attack on good taste' angle. So I went there; to the Tate of course, to have a good look at the pieces of art. The place was buzzing, I could barely get in the door. It was obviously something everyone was getting worked up about. The exhibition was called "The Inner Mind: A Postmodern Expression of Internalism against Externalism", so that was almost half the article gone already. The artist was there, Mr. Davy Kite, looking smug but quite self contained. The artwork, as I was soon to discover, consisted of variations on a single theme, that of a human brain. And when I looked at the first exhibit, the word 'pickled' sprang to mind. A brain, in all its grotesque reality, on a plate with a fork and spoon on either side. I must admit, I felt my guts reeling slightly. By the time I completed my tour of the exhibits I was feeling decidedly queasy.

I saw the artist, still standing where he had been when I came in, still looking smug. He saw me approaching and I think he recognised me. "Oh dear me, if it isn't my ever newsworthy nemesis. Excuse me if I

cannot remember the name of the rag you work for." I smirked at his typically droll attitude. "Do you mind if I call you Davy, or just Mr. Kite?"

"It doesn't worry me, mister...?" "Phil. Just Phil."

"Well, Phil, is there something I can do for you? Did you enjoy my exhibition?" He said and I could see he knew I still felt uncomfortable. He also spoke with an irony that suggested he was familiar with the rubbishing I gave his last exhibition. He stood with his arms crossed in a sharply cut suit, his dark hair short and bristly. His green eyes piercing and unnerving. "Enjoy? Well, I don't know if that's the way I'd put it. There's only so many times you can look at the inside of a human brain."

"Is that so? But they are eternally fascinating, so much contained within such a tiny organ. Still largely unexplored, but there are some of us that are willing to explore these dark, hidden places." He looked at me intently as he said this, and it brought to mind the artist in Devon. I queried him about it, maybe he'd know who I had in mind. "Is my work of so little interest to you? Oh, I should be hurt, but I shall forgive you this transgression. It is quite obvious of course. The only possible artist in Devon who could be of interest to a hack, excuse the term but it is appropriate, such as yourself. You mean Byron Glogaeur, the one who would face death in order to discover his art. A mentor of mine before we went our separate ways."

"Is he the one in the coma?"

"The coma? Oh yes, but that is a state fundamental to his work. Without that closeness to death, he couldn't create." I listened to what he said, watching how he said them, and got an innate sense of the shallowness of the man. His outward artistic appearance was a sham; a facade, his sole interest was in inflating his own ego.

"How can I find out more?"

"You wish...Of course you do, that is your job. Well, I can arrange for

you to see him." He smiled, almost wolfishly. "But first you will of course allow me to give you a tour, explain the meaning behind my art. I can see you have little understanding of what you see before you." That was the first time I heard mention of the name Byron Glogaeur, and perhaps now I wish it was the last.



II. Something Concrete

My train left at eight-thirty. So early that I almost gave up the idea of going down to Devon at all; but I managed to get myself up in plenty of time. I even had a decent breakfast. It was a nice day as well, which helped. The early sun had allowed me to wake on time. The train was on time, and I carried my bags on board. I took two suitcases, enough stuff for a couple of days. I'd tried to talk my editor into letting me cover the story, but naturally he laughed it off. As far as he was concerned we'd already done our 'art piece'. So I made use of some of my leave, I had it coming, and my burning curiosity had the better of me.

I got into Exeter at about eleven-thirty and was bit unsure of how to proceed. I had an appointment at the residence of the artist at three in the afternoon. The place itself was near a village called Thirlston, somewhere between Exeter and Torquay. I didn't know Devon at all so I wasn't too sure about where to stay. I had planned on stopping in Exeter, but it was out of season, so I decided that I may as well find a B&B in Torquay. At least I could enjoy the sea for a few days if this turned out to be nothing. It was almost two in the afternoon before I was settled in my room in Torquay, it had taken me a great deal longer than I had assumed it would. I'd catch a taxi to Thirlston if I had any hope of getting there on time. It would be expensive, but I could charge it to the office. Lucky as I was, the taxi driver had never heard of Thirlston, so I had to give him the directions Mr. Kite had given me. He had warned me not to be late, and for some reason I felt nervous; I didn't want to be late either.

Still, it went better than I could have hoped, and we reached Thirlston at ten to three. It was easy to find Thirlston Manor, it being virtually the only inhabited place in the village. The place was so dead I was astounded, I hadn't seen a single person since arriving; it was unnerving. Especially for me, someone used to the hustle and bustle of city life. I

know it is more fashionable to downplay your emotions, but I have to admit I was feeling almost a child's excitement when I strolled up the gravel driveway after leaving the taxi. The great gothic mansion loomed up on me as I approached, gargoyles gaping from the stylised buttresses. It was setting the scene for what was to come, and still I was completely unaware of the profound effect this experience would have on my life.

The huge brass knocker was entirely in keeping with the style of the building, and a boom reverberated about the building when it struck the door. The door was opened by Jill Fareham, the artist's wife. I admit to being slightly confused; I hadn't expected a wife, the idea didn't seem to fit with the reclusive artist line that I'd been thrown. "Come in. You must be Mr. Marlowe."

"Yes. Just call me Phil." "Any relation to the..."

"No. My mother had a sense of humour, unfortunately."

"Not unfortunate at all. Would you like a drink, or would you prefer to see my husband first?" I was still feeling a bit strange, so I accepted the drink. It would hopefully help me relax a moment. Jill returned with the drinks and I tried to gauge from her conversation how she felt about her husband. It seemed odd that an outgoing thirty year old woman would be married to a secluded artist who, by all accounts, was intent on dying. She flicked her long black hair every time she mentioned his name, almost a nervous twitch, so I guessed underneath her seemingly calm exterior she wasn't quite as happy about her husband's condition as she appeared. She talked about his project, his last attempt at creating something great, though she never told me anything specific; instead waiting until I could witness her husband's progress myself. I finished my drink, a fine malt whiskey, and told her I was ready to see him.

Byron Glogaeur was laid out in the back bedroom, which was on the ground floor. It was like stepping into a hospital ward, the white-washed walls and the plain bed from which he 'created'. In life, Byron may have been a great artist, but he didn't make a good corpse. His forty-eight year

old features looked tired and washed out, his hair almost completely grey and splayed out untidily over the pillows; though of course he wasn't really a corpse, he was really in a coma. Jill gave me a long, drawn out explanation of what his great work was about, too long and complex to repeat here, but the gist of it was this. Strangely, for an artist, Byron had begun his career in the sciences, though always on the fringe and constantly involved in outside artistic pursuits. He had studied cybernetics up to degree level at Brichester University, concentrating his areas of research to the human-machine interface. Some disagreements on his methods, and a constant transgressing of University policy had led to him being expelled, though the reluctance to lose such an awesome mind had allowed him leeway for a while.

From then on he concentrated on working as an artist, both as a painter and sculptor, but his work had never satisfied him. For him, neither of these paths nor materials were sufficiently primal. He had dreams, vivid dreams which he wished to represent, then when he woke up and tried to recreate the wondrous images from his subconscious, he found himself lacking. He had experimented, working with once living tissue - where Davy Kite had entered the picture - and dead vegetable matter. Byron wanted to work with the stuff of life itself as he saw it, dream-stuff, the wonderful substance which most connects us to our primal selves. So he had come up with this idea; combining his long experience of cybernetics and art, he would take certain drugs that would induce a coma and be kept alive for years by the machines which operated around him and a regular medical staff, drip fed to keep his body alive and his mind floating.

There was another machine, an unusual one of his own invention, something he had begun working on at Brichester University, but had left long discarded up until now. It connected his brain by a series of electrodes, this was where his great work was to take shape. Built out of the stuff of his dreams, it would be his final gift to Humanity on his death. Once this event occurred the function of the machine would change, it would become the vessel from which his masterpiece would flow. People had merely to seat themselves in a specially designed

compartment and then find themselves immersed in it, within the work of art he literally died to bring the world. For two years he had lain supine on this bed, for two years kept floating on the verge of death. How much longer he was to lie like that I don't know, though from the state Jill was in by the time she finished explaining, I thought that maybe he would outlive her. She seemed to be teetering on the edge of nervous exhaustion, the two year ordeal was pushing her close to breaking point. I left after a few hours, I had enough to base a story on and it didn't look as if I needed to stay here as long as I had thought; but stay I did. For a few days at least, most of them spent on the beach.



III. A Probable Cause for Regret

Three weeks after my story on Glogaeur had been published I received a telephone message. It was from Jill, her husband had died, and she thought I might like to come down to Devon and discover what he had left. Of course I leapt at the chance, since my visit the story had nagged continuously at me. My write up had filled only a few column inches, but it deserved bigger, though how could it become bigger unless the artist's work had actually come to fruition; and now it had. Many journalists had shown interest - even those on the qualities - probably after being clued up by my story, but since no one but me had shown any interest before his death I was to be given the exclusive. I was so happy, I thought that finally my big break had come. My trip down was better arranged this time as I knew where I was going. I drew up outside the manor the day after I got the call. It was raining, and I had to wait for several minutes on the doormat before Jill answered the door.

She looked pale, rather like a starving vampire with her bright red lips and long black hair, but it was obvious that the long drawn out grief had done it to her. She filled me in whilst I waited in the front room, a whiskey in my hand. He had just faded away one night, and she had barely noticed, if it hadn't of been for the heart-rate monitor she might not have. She admitted to me that she had come close to pulling the plug herself, just ending it all, she had felt as tied to that machine as Byron had been. If you consider it unusual for people to be telling stuff like this to a journalist, then don't, it is surprising how easily people forget; start thinking you are just another human being and start spilling their guts. I didn't make use of this fact in this case, the story was bigger than the participants, but I won't pretend that I haven't done so in the past. She stopped talking and gazed at me as if there were something else she wanted to say, she winced and then, with a smile which looked pained at best, said, "Come, I shall show you what you came to see."

I smiled and set down my empty glass, followed her from the room. We were headed to the same part of the house we had gone to before, and in Byron's room the antiseptic hospital smell still coloured the air. The machine was still there, making the occasional beeping noise, as was the bed, neatly made with the sheets folded in a pile at the bottom; its emptiness almost more disturbing than its previous state of occupancy. I waited for Jill to speak, but instead she just looked towards the door. So I turned and gave an involuntary jump, for there in the door was Byron Glogaeur himself. I coughed, "Mr. Glogaeur? It seems I was misled. I thought you were supposed to be dead."

"Supposed?" Glogaeur smiled. "That was just a small deception to lure you here. Perfectly necessary of course."

"Necessary for what?" I asked, and looking around saw that Jill had disappeared from the room. "Necessary for you to be made aware of the full extent of my genius."

"Genius? I see little genius here. In fact, I'd say insanity fitted the bill rather more perfectly than genius. What was the purpose of this little charade?" I was angry, maybe more with myself than I was at him, this story far from being my greatest moment looked as if it would bring me down. But his reaction made me feel a great deal more satisfied, for he twitched rather nervously and looked rather uncomfortable, then he smiled. "We shall see. Jill.?" I turned but not fast enough, the syringe had already pierced my flesh and all I succeeded in doing was snapping the needle. I would have called out in pain but my body had ceased to respond. My legs collapsed beneath me, and though I hit the floor hard, I felt nothing. "Now where were we? Oh yes, my little charade. No charade at all, what you saw was in fact the real thing. I was, now how would you put it? Yes, I was priming the pump, making the initial preparations before you could kindly step in and fill the gaps in my work of art."

"The artist dying for his work is a bit of a cliché don't you think? Rather unnecessary when you consider it, why not let someone else die for your

work? There is no reason why it should have to be an artist. Why not a journalist instead? But then perhaps you consider yourself an artist..." He gave a deep, humourless chuckle as both he and Jill lifted me up on to a chair. "I had no idea who I was going to use, I had thought that maybe someone local would do, but then Davy called me; it seemed you were digging into what I was doing. He knew of course, he even helped me make some contacts in the beginning, and was happy to volunteer you as a subject. Seems you upset him a trifle, he rarely shows it, but Davy Kite can be a very brutal man when it comes to defending his art. Some of his previous critics have become more central to his work than they might have liked. Then there's Jill, my ever faithful priestess. She was the one who decided you were suitable, that you would be perfectly pliable in my capable hands. She is quite an actress my Jill, played the doting yet uncomfortable wife to a tee."

"I have long been interested in the more esoteric arts, have read texts which supposedly don't exist. I have taken part in rituals that would turn the hardest cynic like yourself pale. In short I am a treader on the paths of truths which few are prepared to accept and in my wanderings one universal truth has come to light, the main psychic gateway to other worlds is found in our dreams, and in traversing these gateways I came to the attention of certain...entities. You may have heard mention of several, but Yog-Sothoth in particular is the one I am concerned with."

"I shall not attempt to describe its greatness to you, for soon you shall be fully aware aware, suffice to say that it desires a foothold in this world and I would provide it. Our reward will be incredible, as such rewards are. I will be its main representative in the reshaping of this world in its image, it would see this world as its world, as all worlds will eventually become. Jill and I will become one with the Old Ones, can you imagine that? An eternal epiphany of power that we shall share." He pauses, gazing down at the mechanism in which I am trapped, and the smile that flashes briefly across his lips is chilling. "My machine is both alchemical and electrical, combining magic and physics in a way previously unattempted. It is designed to be a gateway, and is ready but for a few important parameters, and you will be the most important."

Your dreaming consciousness will become part of the machine, will be drawn inside and held permanently open, creating a residence for Yog-Sothoth in our world, from which it can master all our dreams, make the very stuff of it real and use it as putty in the reshaping of this pitiful planet."

I tried to move, to blink, to do anything that would put at least part of my body under my control, but nothing. I was paralysed as I had never been before, as few people have ever been. I was utterly powerless, forced to listen to this madman, hoping beyond hope that Jill would do something. But she had been part of it, part of his grand deception, why would she do anything? Glogaeur smiles and switches on his machine, but I watch the shadow as it extends over me and across the floor, the shadow the machine throws as it is pushed towards me. The hollow portion of the machine encloses me and I feel incredibly afraid. This is it. Then hope expands in my chest, for I see Jill walking stealthily behind her husband, looking as gaunt as ever, a fine sharp blade thrust forwards in her hand. At that moment she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen and I could have loved her for all eternity. Glogaeur smiles again. "This is incredibly exciting, the time is near."

"Here." Jill says and Glogaeur turns smiling. "Excellent my love, excellent." He says and takes the knife from her. "We shall need this shortly." She smiles broadly and I feel a sudden tightness in my chest. All thoughts of rescue, the fantasy scenarios that had been rushing through my head dissolve and the reality finally hits me. This is it, the moment I had never believed would occur was about to take place, I was really going to die. Something touched my temples lightly and immediately my consciousness abandoned me.

IV. Openings

Darkness so intense that is as if nothing else exists, but then I become aware of shadows, and a light falling down from above; not a direct light, more a diffusion of light, and the objects that throw the shadows are the stuff of nightmares. A long, winding driveway winds away in front of me and somehow, despite the darkness I can see it. The pathway it follows is a confusing one, with extreme twists and turns that seem somehow not right. I begin to follow but not through choice, something is pulling me onwards. The light I see now falls from the stars, and thankfully the twists and turns of the path avoid the gargantuan objects which fill this world with shadow. The stars seem incredibly far away, and offer not an iota of warmth for this is a world of utter fridity, I feel frozen to the very core, yet warmth is now something far outside my understanding.

One of the objects move, shuffling in a disgusting manner, a shapeless thing pulled along by a writhing mass of tentacles. I had thought they were immobile, statues created by some hideous imagination, but to see them move was something that shocked me to my core. Bile filled my throat, brought about by the acrid smell which wafted through the still air. The path still drew me onwards, to what I do not know, but my awareness of self was returning along with my memories and I began to put things together. I saw these things as creations, as could they not be? Creations of Byron Glogaeur, the only man I knew who could have created such an utterly alien landscape. A landscape through which I am forced to move without my own volition. This could only be what Glogaeur had been working on whilst in his coma, a place of extreme hideousness conjured from the depths of his twisted imagination. And if I am dreaming inside this creation of his then that can mean but one thing. His machine works, on some layers at least.

The path drew me close to one of the things, close enough that I could

look upon it with as much clarity as possible in this gloom. I am loathe to guess its height, for measuring distances has never been one of my skills, but I knew that if I hovered at an equal height I would feel intense vertigo. Bigger than a house certainly, maybe as high as an office building. It was incredibly daunting and glistened in a horrible manner, like the flesh of a mottled grey jellyfish and of all earthly creatures that's what it most drew to my mind. There seemed no limit to the number of tentacles that cascaded from that massive bulk, most of them trailing in space, just writing in the air as if reaching for something, only the lower tentacles were involved in the locomotion of the creature. I assume the upper tentacles, the ones I had assumed served little purpose, were each tipped by a single translucent eye. I shivered and turned away, wondering what aspect of Glogaeur's life had called to him such a creature.

What disturbs me most about this world is not the sights or smells, but the sounds that constantly bombard my ears. Sibilant whisperings and gibberings against which even the gaping maws of those creatures appear tame. The sounds hint at something far more horrendous to come and the path appears to be leading towards the densest congestion of these sounds. I try my best to halt my progress, but I know it is hopeless, whatever it is I am about to witness, there is certainly no turning back. The pathway steepens, yet I ascend with no difficulty, and I can now see something of my destination, the lip of some crater. I will myself to turn away, to behold the creatures rather than what is coming, but my head remains fixed forwards and before I know it I am on the verge of this crater. Try as I might, there is nothing I can do to stop my foot stepping out into space and again, I am falling into blackness, but not for long.

There is a definite light here, something that sends a chill to my very bones, a living, writhing source of energies, energies that signify both the beginning and end of all living things. It appears small at first, growing as I speed towards it, but even though it is still far away I can feel its influence, it pushes at my thoughts, engulfs my mind in its cold and utterly alien intelligence. My consciousness parts to expose all its inner layers, layers which are scrutinized and dissected by that source of

energy, and it does so with a coldness and utter lack of compassion. I am wracked with pains I cannot understand, pain that should send me unconscious but does not, because their very source is my consciousness. I feel myself reduced to virtual nothingness where my thoughts are the only mass I have and then my thoughts themselves begin fragmenting and I no longer have an identity, not such much having the lack of one, but rather having no comprehension of what an identity is. Then as rapidly as it had began, it stops and the energy attempts communication with me, and it identifies itself. Yog-Sothoth. The very name sends spasms of agony through my consciousness, as does every word communicated to me by that thing. That god from the time before all gods.

All that time I am still falling, ever onwards towards the source of these emanations. I know something of what the world can expect when this being is unleashed and I am engulfed with a fear that hacks at my sanity. Though I can also see what Glogaeur can expect as this being's emissary and that is some small consolation. All the while this being carves its words upon my soul as an awe fills me, not at its greatness, for though it is great I loathe it to the very pit of my being, but at the utter alieness of everything it represents. I had thought about such things in terms of good and evil, but this thing utterly transcends that, it sees no such distinction and though I think of it as driven by desire, desire is something equally alien to it. It tore my consciousness to shreds with a cool withdrawal any scientist would be shocked by, examined its contents and put it back together without a passing thought, almost as if it did it completely subconsciously.

So I was absorbed, and I felt my physical death, the death of my body in that distant place where Glogaeur still clutches his scalpel. I now know things, things I had never thought possible, for I am a part of Yog-Sothoth now, a being whose creations still strike fear into the hearts of Humanity. I see nothing compared to what it sees, for I am but a single cell in this great burning thing. I know what is to become of our world when Glogaeur unleashes this energy through his machine and I know I shall always be there in some way, even as everyone and everything will

be eventually. Even as an insignificant part, I still share in its power, and through it I broadcast this message back through the depths of time, while I still have my thoughts to enable me to do so. Hoping that somehow I can affect things before they start going wrong, to force the path of the esoterically minded towards other things, to make sure neither Glogaeur nor anyone like him can see even the beginning of this path. Please hear me! Even now my coherence deserts me, this is the only time I will be able to do this...just remember as always...Yog-Sothoth owns us all, and in time, it will take us back...



V. Epilogue

There is an irony in all this which I failed to mention before, one which fills me with an endless sense of unease. For the more I have read on this Yog-Sothoth and the cult of fact and fiction surrounding it, combined with the events of the past few weeks, have made certain things abundantly clear to me. Phil, or whoever he really was, should not have survived any moment longer than his first contact with Yog-Sothoth. An alien that powerful could have taken his mind apart, shreaded it to its component parts in seconds, less than that. So I got to thinking why. The only reason Phil could have been able to gather his wits, to allowed access to the very stuff of Yog-Sothoth; to compose a message and throw it back through layers of time itself, it that Yog-Sothoth must have wanted him to. That somehow, concealed within that message was a gateway, that Yog-Sothoth held a contingency against events turning against it in that future time.

My wife glimpsed what Phil glimpsed, she saw inside the mind of Yog-Sothoth itself and that was more than enough. A being contiguous with all time and all space, a being which is also a gateway between disparate ages, had opened a door into my wife's mind. Her madness has been its immediate effect but now that is receeding, and it is with increasing apprehension that I now view her apparent return to complete sanity. I know, even as I suspect she does as well, that this is merely the calm before the storm. That Yog- Sothoth no longer has any need for Glogaeur and his fancy machines; or even our friend Phil, for he has his gateway, locked in the mind of my wife. Even now I sense them marshalling themselves, those great alien beings that would posses our world once more.

We plan to leave, to pack our bags and go far away from people, whatever good that will do. So I leave this, with my best wishes.

What good it will do, I don't know. I have a feeling that no distance will ever be enough...



DREAM-SENDINGS

E. P. Berglund

From *Sorcerie de Demonologie*
by Count de Hammais

The water moved sluggishly under the pressure of the dark depths, slowly stirring the oceanic vegetation that adhered to the outside walls of the city. The vegetation had originated at various lesser depths, which attested to the non-permanence of the city's foundations. The angles of the city, which were acute and obtuse at the same time, also attested to the fact that the city had not been built to the mathematics of this universe.

The sound of the water moving against the outside walls of the city filtered through the walls and through the water inside the walls and entered His dreams as a faint echo of the present reality. He moved restlessly in His infinite sleep, sending slow waves through the inside waters of His city. His dreams became telepathic waves emanating away from His mind, His alien bulk, upward and outward from His prison, flooding the minds of the sensitive ones among the surface dwellers. Those that did not go insane, went into spasms of mindless creativeness in which they tried to make substance of their dreams in various media forms.

Dreams...

...of His passion, His desire for procreation, His misgivings of having offspring.

...of His eternal striving to conquer, His dark magic covering the

universe like a plague.

...of His triumph, reigning supreme over this, if not other universes.

...of His omnipotentness, but...then...

After eons of dreamless sleep, His dreams were disturbed by His memories. His memories flitted in and out of His dreams, which caused some of the sensitive surface dwellers to lose their sanity and take their own lives. Other sensitive surface dwellers, who did not lose enough of their sanity to take their own lives, sought out others of the same ilk and they formed cults to worship Him in His alieness and His dream-sendings that they could not even hope to begin to understand. And sometimes during their ritual worships of Him they thought an occasional sacrifice of a virginal nonsensitive would be helpful, whether it was or not, who is to say?

Memories continued to flit in and out of His dreams, sometimes being caught in His dreamweb so that they could be examined.

Memories...

...of His mating with Idh-yaa on or near the dim green star called Xoth, and Their three offspring, Ghatanathoa, Ythogtha and Zoth-Ommog.

...of His life among the stars and His seeping down from those stars to the backwater planet, blue and green in color, on the outskirts of the spiral galaxy. The surface dwellers of the planet called it Earth; a hard name to pronounce without distorting the vocal cords.

...of His building and occupying the mighty city of R'lyeh, greatest and grandest city upon this planet.

...of His and the Others rebellion against Their brothers from the star Betelgeuse in the Hyades, those brethren who had been misnamed the Elder Gods.

...of His confinement in the city of R'lyeh as punishment for His rebellious nature and its sinking beneath the primordial waves for all time. As if time had any meaning to Them; just about as much as space had meaning.

...of His half-brother, Hastur, who was allowed to walk upon the winds of the planet, but never allowed to stray elsewhere.

...that reminded Him that at some time, measured in millennia, the chains of force binding Them to Their confinement would dissolve and They, the rebellious ones, would once again know Their freedom.

...that cities are hard to build in any dimension, thus Their plans to drag this backwater planet through the gateway to the dimension of the red supergiant star known only as The Primal Star. And in the new dimension the surface dwellers, those who survived the transfer between the dimensions, would become eternal to serve Them for an eternity, for whatever purpose.

...of His occasional waking when R'lyeh arose once again to the surface of the deep waters. The sentient door to the city opened automatically in hope that now was the time of the true and final awakening. He would have a short period of freedom before R'lyeh would once again sink beneath the waves, the chains of force dragging Him back through the door before it closed and the waves washed over the mighty city.

...of the surface dweller who had written down an enigmatic couplet composed while under the influence of one of His dream-sendings:

That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons, even death may die.

Some time in the far distant future, the stars will begin to quake and shudder in their hoary paths through the universe. Their speeds will slow to a crawl, their paths crossing one upon another. The time will draw nigh when the dimensional boundaries shall come asunder and all of the many dimensions shall also overlay one upon another. The new Space

will become the new Universe before starting backward once again. The more change there will be, the more everything will remain the same, eternally, from beginning to end to beginning.

He became motionless once again and slipped into a deeper slumber. A dreamless sleep came over Him and all was calm. Further aeons of sleep, undisturbed by memories or even dreams, caused to come about the time when the rituals had been forgotten by the surface dwellers. Even the remembrance of Their names, but this could change at any time for:

In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.

TO THE DANCING TREE

Ian Davey & Peter A. Worthy

It was unusually cold for an August afternoon when Karl Turner pushed open the wrought iron gate leading to archaic Temphill's small cemetery. Under his arm was an eighty leaf A3 sketching pad and in his hand a pack of charcoal sticks for he had come to the decaying Cotswold town with the intention of adding to his collection of rubbings of tombstones. Many of his friends commented on it as a rather morbid hobby, but Karl was an admirer of the simple unpretentious artistry of the carvings. As a painter of dark, gruesome paintings he found them inspirational. He had long been in demand as an illustrator for collections of macabre fiction, and often his artwork overshadowed the dark literary images his cover was supposed to enhance.

The cemetery contained under fifty pallid graves, all in varying degrees of disrepair yet, surprisingly, the headstones were very well preserved. The unwelcoming mass of knee-high weeds and grasses standing as mute testimony to how visits to the cemetery of the church in High Street had declined. Not even the usual cursory tidy up by the local council. It was in such places as this that Karl usually found his best pieces, old lichen covered headstones with beautiful antiquated images carved into them. He would have to clear away the choking weeds from each stone before even getting the opportunity to take a rubbing, and it looked as if this would be the greatest difficulty such was the profusion of the grey, diseased grass.

As was usual with his impulsive artistic temperament, Karl had come with only the tools of his trade, so he pushed his way through the tangled mass, heading as always towards the far corner; where the older graves tended to be located. The clearing of the prolific plants proved

more trouble than he at first assumed as the weeds seemed to have a mind of their own, grasping his boots or jeans with their wispy tendrils. He did eventually manage to reach his destination none too damaged for his ordeal. Placing his hand on the first headstone he came too, it proved to be a small one almost completely hidden; it certainly hadn't been visible from the entrance.

It was about two feet high, a small arch flecked at the edges with yellow-green lichen. Putting his paper and charcoal to one side, Karl gently cleared the stone revealing its carved facade to the light of day. He glanced at the inscription: *Thomas Harcott 1605 - 1611, Freed by God's Divine Mercy*. A six year old, he always found children's graves the most tragic because they awakened feelings of mortality. They also tended to give him the most inspiration; a lot of his imagery depended on childhood fears, and these inscriptions helped him to conjure up such fears in himself before putting them on paper or canvas. He stared at the inscription for a few minutes. Strange, 'Freed by God's Divine Mercy' what an odd thing to put. Freed from what? Karl was aware of Temphill's ill repute, having heard some of the strange tales which now and then filtered out of the region.

He shrugged and reaching behind him, retrieved his A3 pad and tore off a sheet and placed it on the headstone. He also managed to grasp a single charcoal stick from the pack without dropping it and gently clasped it between the fingers and thumb of his right hand. Holding the paper steady with his left, Karl with gently sideways strokes, transferred the inscription onto the paper. "I say. EXcuse me..." A low voice called from the cemetery gate. A withered old man with dark, piercing eyes stood watching Karl suspiciously. "What are you doing?" Karl was startled by the sudden voice in the previously still silence, dropping his charcoal stick and losing it in the brambles beneath his feet. He turned to face the man, feeling slightly reluctant to approach. "I'm taking some rubbings..."

Before he could finish, the man came over to him. "Sorry to have caught you there. I'm the curate, pleased to meet you." Karl felt his rising anger

fade almost instantly, only to be replaced with unease. There was something about the curate, he had the notion that the man was not usually this friendly with 'outsiders' as tourists and travelers were normally referred to by the locals. He was very relaxed, whereas Karl was now tense and aggravated, his afternoon seemed ruined.

"You like to do rubbings? There are some much better inscriptions inside. Come, I'll show you." Karl gathered his gear together and followed the curate into the black steepled church, maybe he could salvage his afternoon after all. Inside, he found the curate had not exaggerated and busied himself, all the time the curate watched him, chatting idly away. "What brought you to Temphill, Mr. Turner?"

"A friend of mine used to live here once. He told me about the church."

"Once? What was his name?"

"Albert Young. He lived at No.11, South Street. He was a writer, he disappeared..." Karl noticed the curate become slightly pale and a frown cross his face momentarily. "Did you know him?"

"No." Replied the curate almost too hastily. Karl continued. "He always said I should come and get copies of the inscriptions here. He said they were...unusual. Definitely pieces for my collection."

"You like unusual things? I think I can direct you to something you'd find...exceptional." The confident smile had returned to the curate's face. "Yes, certainly...surprising. Let me give you the directions. I'd take you myself, only I have other things to do." An edge had entered the curate's voice, an unpleasant mocking tone that unnerved Karl. "You know the woods towards Goatswood?"

"Vaguely. Albert mentioned them a couple of times, it was Temphill he was really interested in."

"Well, follow these directions. If its rubbings you want, then this place is worth visiting."

"It looks a bit of a way, won't it be getting dark soon?"

"You shouldn't worry about that. Anyway, you're almost finished."

* * *

The field led upwards in a steep slope and a narrow mud path snaked its way gradually, as if afraid to take a direct path into the woods. Karl followed the path silently, he didn't like the oppressive atmosphere of the forest. It had looked gloomy and dim from the path, now from inside it was positively dark. The canopy must be very dense, he reasoned, for it blocked out so much of the sunlight. To ease his tension, Karl began to whistle only to find that he stopped almost instantly, he realised he was listening out for unfamiliar noises.

At one point Karl thought he saw the gleam of dull metal but carried on, the sky was clouding over faster than he would have assumed possible. It had been cold, but the sun had been shining brightly when he came out, maybe he'd missed the gradual encroachment while he had been in the church. The further into the wood he headed, the quieter it became. He looked up ahead and saw that just a few more twists and turns remained on the path and the trees were getting thicker. Closer up, the trees seemed bloated and malformed, the trunks were curved strangely and the branches were bent and twisted as if in pain. A breeze blew through the treetops, making a sound like desperate whispering.

If the curate's promise didn't come up to scratch, Karl decided, there would be no harm in sitting and sketching the forest, there was definitely a sinister air to it and it made him shudder. He continued on in the dimness, light flickering like a kaleidoscope pattern through the leaves on the swaying branches. Karl couldn't help but notice that the path seemed well worn, he couldn't imagine who might come here and for what reason. The wood just didn't seem to invite the casual traveller or walker. He checked his directions and then turned onto another path which led its uninviting way into the murky shadows. Karl tripped several times over gnarled, exposed roots and he found himself thinking

that he did not recall the woods appearing to be this big.

He guessed that it was getting darker because it was clouding over and his grip tightened on his pad, it had better not rain, any drawing or rubbings he took would get thoroughly ruined. Abruptly, the path came to an end and Karl stared at his surroundings. He was in a clearing, weak sunlight came through a break in the treetops above, making twisted shadows on the muddy ground. Searching for whatever the curate had sent him here for, at the far end he noticed a large tree as his eyes swept past, immediately he returned his gaze there with an astonished gasp. Almost stumbling in his rush to get to the tree, he found himself looking upon some of the oddest carvings he'd ever seen; the tree was covered in them as high as he could see and though they had the appearance of having been there for a long time, they were not at all distorted as would be expected due to the growth of the tree.

The carvings were the work of a diseased mind of genius, dancing, writhing figures involved in adoration of ghastly, alien creatures made up of masses of hooves and tentacles; that the tree had been a site of worship at some point for a religion which could even now still be practised in the backwater areas of the Severn Valley occurred to Karl. Hadn't Albert hinted as much? Tracing his fingers over the meticulously carved figures, marvelling at their depth of detail. He followed the flowing images as they danced in their devotion of the foul, twin hoofed monstrosities and noticed a more sinister aspect, didn't the faces of the worshippers appear slightly pained?

Karl put down his paper and charcoal, he had to see higher up the trunk and clambered up onto one of the lower branches of the sturdy tree, sure enough the images assumed a more sinister aspect. The dancers were depicted as writhing over the creatures which were more clearly defined, rope like tentacles reaching the sky like palsied fingers and a huge mouth. The dancers were twisting at unnatural angles, legs bent back and necks twisting. He hauled himself further up the tree. More horror impinged on the dancing figures as they were now being devoured, he shivered as his fingers ran over the carvings, fascination mingling with

distaste. Karl found himself thinking he had to find the artist, his own work paled in comparison next to the intricate work.

The work continued up the tree to the very top, he'd climbed so much he hadn't realised that there were not many more climable branches left. How could anyone have gotten up, let alone been secure enough to carve the figures? Still, he had to see more. He took hold of the next nearest branch to his head and pulled himself up with an immense effort. The flickering light from through the canopy cast shadows across the figures, giving them the illusion of a strange kind of movement. The dancers were no longer clearly defined, the creatures having taken their places in the dance. Just above him he could see another carving, a single being made up of a huge cloud with various appendages reaching out as if in answer to the cavorting of the other creatures.

A flurry of sudden movement caught Karl off balance and he fell away from the tree, hurtling towards the ground. Consciousness deserted him and in his mind he played out the bizarre ritual in a series of terrifying dreams. All the grotesque things he had ever painted came slaving before his eyes. He fled hopelessly away, for all his ingenuity he could not escape them. They were relentless, knowing better than he what he was trying to do. He could sense they were toying with him, hunting him for pleasure. Voices called out to him, luring him to join them, to be one of them. It was all Karl could do to resist and as the battering of his subconscious drew to a close he retreated into a welcoming grey mist. He relaxed all was silent.

* * *

A cacophony of weirdly ululating piping music drew Karl awake and as his eyes flicked open, he saw the tentacled horrors moving in circles around him. Unable to tell if he were dreaming still, or very much awake he stared terrified at a group of people dancing in the circle about him too - presiding over which was the curate of the church in High Street. All chanting. In panic he tried to get up and flee, only to discover like the dancers, he too was naked. Two people paused in the dance and

grasped his arms, lifting him into an unsteady standing position in the centre of the circle.

"Dance. Dance for the Black Goat of the Woods." They whispered and though he tried to resist the music seeped into his mind and took hold of his body, making him dance his own dance in the center even joining in the chant for it was all he could say. The piping grew louder and the tempo of the alien music shifted to a faster melody, the dance had purpose for a nexus was forming . Here in the Garden of the Thousand Young was one of the places where the layers between Humanity and Outside were thinnest, and with each passing moment the gateway grew.

Screaming somewhere inside his own body, Karl looked up into the maw of Shub-Niggurath...

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO CTHULHU

Sean Rodgers

1. And the sun rose upon the Earth in the year of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven. The Earth had become populated by the race of Human beings, and they became as a foul stench to the *Great Cthulhu*, and the *Great Old One* woke from Its rest under the sea, in the cavernous city of R'lyeh, and looked upon the Earth, and It was displeased.

And the *Great Cthulhu* decided to rid the Earth for once and all of the race of the Humans, and wipe their very presence from this universe.

But the *Great Cthulhu* would not directly attack the pitiful race; nay, It would work Its powers slowly and remains in Its great capital. And the sun set on the world of Humans, prosperous and wealthy. Thus ended the first day.

2. And the sun rose upon the World, and the *Great Cthulhu* set Its plans into motion.

Man turned on his fellow man, and began to work great violence upon the Earth. American fought Russian; British fought French; German fought Canadian; Polish fought Russian and so on. And lo, even the very hills were polluted by the machineries of their war.

And their priests cried out to their false gods, and to no avail. Across the Earth, cities great and small were laid to waste. No man, woman or child

could totally escape the war.

And the sun set on a world of pain and violence and death.

Thus ended the second day.

3. And the sun rose upon the Earth, and yet *Great Cthulhu* was not finished.

It sent Its First Messenger to every part of the land, disguised as an ordinary man, and it worked its treachery upon the Human race, urging them to despoil the World and bring the foul machinations of Nature crashing down.

And so the men followed the directions of the First Messenger, and dropped bombs in the ocean upon fish and whales, burned zoos and slaughtered animals without cause.

And the sun set on a World of dying and dead animals and plants.

Thus ended the third day.

4. And the sun rose upon the World. And even now, the *Great Cthulhu* was not yet finished.

It sent Its Second Messenger to the Earth's surface. And the Messenger worked its treachery on the Human race; urging them to destroy the mountains and rivers and plains in which they lived.

And do the men followed the directions of the Second Messnger, and destroyed the mountains, burned the forests, and dumped nuclear waste into the lakes and rivers.

And the sun set on a devastated and reeling World.

Thus ended the fourth day.

5. And the sun rose upon the World. And now the end of the *Great Cthulhu's* plans was insight; Humankind was nearly dead and destroyed, the Earth was in ruins.

But not all was complete.

The *Great Cthulhu* sent out feelers into each of the minds of every thing left alive on the Planet, and destroyed the minds. And even the remaining Humans were turned into gibbering hulks, completely insane.

And the sun set on a World of maddened, dying men.

Thus ended the fifth day.

6. And the sun rose upon the Earth, on this, the Last Day. The Day of Armageddon.

The great city of R'lyeh rose again from the ocean, and the Great Cthulhu set foot upon the Land. The few men gathered around It, shrieking their despair and insanity.

And the *Great Cthulhu* looked for one brief second upon the dying World, and then cast Its mighty will down upon it.

And a rain of fire consumed the last traces of Mankind and all his works. And down to the very roots of the mountains themselves, every last living and non-living thing was destroyed utterly.

And the sun set upon the dead World

Thus ended the sixth day.

*7. And on the seventh day,
Great Cthulhu rested...*

AMBROSE

John Tynes

Once upon a time there was a man named Ambrose. He was short and stocky and had a snowy-white beard of which he was very proud, for it made him feel like a wise man. Ambrose lived in a huge city that lay on the shore of a great, dark lake. It was always night, and gray stars always shone in the hollow sky.

The city where Ambrose lived had many names: Yhtill, Yashar, Carcosa, and others. He knew them all, though he didn't know how -- for he had never met anyone else in this city and he had always been alone, for as long as he could remember.

Ambrose had once lived in another place. He remembered heat, and he remembered dust. Sometimes when he tried to remember his former life he could taste lead on his tongue, and copper.

Ambrose's city (he thought of it as his, since he was the only one there) was bigger than all outdoors. It was never the same city, either. With the passing of every day, with the slow crawl of every hour, with the turn of his head, it changed. Streets grew wider, buildings grew taller, doors appeared, and windows faded away--or just the opposite. It was a city of magic and wonder, and every time he went out of his home it was like he was seeing it for the first time.

But Ambrose was so alone. He missed other people. He missed talking with friends, he missed telling jokes, he missed playing games, and most of all Ambrose missed being needed by someone else. For in this great city of great solitude no one needed Ambrose. Not even the city--he knew it would get along just fine without him. All of this made Ambrose

very sad.

To forget about his sadness, Ambrose became a tinker. He made things. He fixed the things he made. He made new things from old things that didn't work anymore, and restored old things from new things he regretted making. He made toys and clocks and things that made noise. He made bicycles and water fountains and things that were very quiet. He made all of these things and many more, to try to forget his sadness. But nothing he made could do that, because no matter what he made, he was the only one who would ever see it. Sadness poured over him like sunlight, but there was no sunlight in the big and always-new city he lived in. He only remembered it from his old life, and that was only a dream.

Every day was the same for Ambrose. He would awaken, and then stay in bed a little while longer, since no one was there to tell him what to do or when to get up. Soon he would feel guilty for staying in bed and wasting the day--although he didn't really know when a day started and when a day ended, since there was no sun--and he would get up and move about. He never ate breakfast, or lunch or dinner, because there was no food in the city. But Ambrose never got hungry. He remembered eating food, and remembered how good it was and how much he liked different foods, but like sunlight these memories were only a dream.

Once Ambrose got up, he would walk around the building he had taken for his home and look at his recent tinkering. Some things would have broken or run down during the night, and would need fixing. Some things just wouldn't look as good as they used to, and would need cleaning or just plain tinkering with. Some things, a very few things, would be just right. Ambrose would spend the morning with all of them, playing with them or making them work or just watching them.

Then he'd take a walk around the city. Not around the whole city--for it was far too large to ever find the edges, except for where the cobblestones became sand and met the lake--but just through the streets. Every time he went for such a walk, things were different. But Ambrose

never got lost. Whenever he was ready to go back home, he just thought hard about his home and kept walking, and after just a couple of streets he'd be home again.

On his walks, Ambrose always hoped he'd find someone else. Sometimes he would hear distant laughter, or smell food, or see a flicker of movement in a window. But he could never find these things for real. The laughter always stopped, the smell always faded, the movement disappeared. He soon learned to stop running after these things, except for every now and then when he just couldn't help it. But he never found anyone else, and it just made him sad.

When he got done with his walk, Ambrose would come back home and fix the things he'd made that needed fixing, and clean the things he'd made that needed cleaning. By evening all of his things would be as good as he could make them once more, until the next day when he'd see new things to fix and tinker with. But his evenings were always free, and Ambrose always did the same thing.

Every evening, he would walk from his home through the streets and to the shore. There he would sit on one of the benches that lined the street along the beach and would stare out across the lake. The waves would roll in, thick and dark, and break on the shore. Ambrose would watch the water, but that wasn't all he watched.

For across the water--far, far away--lay the palace. The palace was huge and grand and so beautiful that sometimes Ambrose would cry just looking at it. It was like a palace from a fairy tale, and Ambrose wanted to go there so badly it hurt him to think about it. But he had no idea how to reach it, and he also didn't know what he would find. What if he had some way to cross the great lake, and got to the great and glorious palace, only to find it just as empty as the city was? He thought that would just kill him, kill him dead. Instead, every night he looked at the palace across the great dark water and he would make up stories about the palace and what went on there, and he tried to pretend that he was there. When he pretended this, he imagined that he was at a great and

wonderful party, with lots of people in lots of costumes, with tables of good food to eat and good things to drink, with glorious music played by musicians in bright costumes and funny masks, with a queen to smile and nod at all the party guests, and a king who would sit wise and regal and mysterious.

At the end of each evening, Ambrose would sigh sadly and rise from the bench. He would walk home through the dark city streets. At home, he would go to bed. In the morning, he would sleep later than he should and get up and do it all over again.

This was Ambrose's life. Day after day after day, he tinkered and he walked and he dreamed, and then one day he was no longer alone and everything changed.

* * *

At the moment that his life changed, Ambrose was walking through the streets of the city to his home. It was evening, and he was coming back from staring at the palace and having wonderful waking dreams about what it would be like to go there, when he heard a noise.

Ambrose had heard noises in the city before. He used to chase them down, but they would always disappear. This time, the noise was a squeaking sound, rhythmic and mechanical like from a machine. Ambrose tried not to listen, because he knew it would just go away if he tried to find it. This time, however, the noise found him.

As he neared an intersection, the sound grew louder, and then around the corner came a small child. But it was no ordinary child. This child was made of clockwork, all gears and rods and pistons, like one of Ambrose's tinker creations. But Ambrose hadn't made this clockwork child. She had a small head and stubby forearms attached to a clockwork body. She had no legs, but instead rolled around on one big wheel and one small wheel, which kept her leaning to one side as she wobbled along. Some kind of liquid dripped from the clockwork child as she moved, which Ambrose guessed must be oil. The clockwork child had

no expression on her chubby porcelain face, but as she rolled, her mouth clacked open and shut and her arms bobbed up and down. The big wheel turned and the little wheel turned and the clockwork child's whole body wobbled left and right, left and right, as she whirled along through the dim and fluid streets of Carcosa.

Ambrose stopped and stared. He had never met any other person in the huge city and he had certainly never expected that the first person he would ever meet would be this little creature. He thought hard about all the things he had ever made and tinkered with: had he ever made this clockwork child? Perhaps he had tinkered her up and then forgotten about her, not noticing when she went wheeling off into the night. But no--he was certain he had never seen her before.

The clockwork child rolled up to him, wobbling, curving, and unsteady. She stopped right at his feet, and Ambrose realized that she had a piece of paper on her back. In fact it was a small envelope, clipped with a clothespin tied to the back of her neck with a golden ribbon. The child looked up at Ambrose, her expression not changing, and waited.

Ambrose leaned down and pulled the envelope from the child's back. On the outside was written, in flowing cursive script, one word:

"AMBROSE."

He stepped back, shocked, and clutched the precious envelope to his chest. Someone had written him! He wasn't alone! Suddenly, everything about his life was different. He fumbled with the envelope, trying to get it open. As he did so, the little clockwork child wobbled away, leaving behind droplets of the thick coppery-smelling liquid. Ambrose took no notice of the odd messenger, and instead rushed home with the envelope clutched tight to his chest.

Arriving at his home, Ambrose raced inside and closed the door. He stood in the light of his cog-and-gear lamp that moved on a slow circuit around the room, riding on a track. As he read the writing on the paper inside the envelope he kept moving forward to keep up with his source

of light.

"YOU ARE INVITED," read the paper, "TO A MASQUERADE BALL." Ambrose trembled. Finally, after so long, someone was out there ^{thinking of him!}

"THE PALACE, IN THE EVENING, ONE WEEK HENCE."

The palace! Ambrose's heart sank. How could he reach the palace? It was so far away!

"WE SHALL CELEBRATE THE BIRTHDAY OF CASSILDA, QUEEN OF THE ROYAL COURT OF YHTILL."

Cassilda! The name immediately sounded familiar, like the name of a forgotten relative or a friend you once had for a too-brief summer.

"COME IN COSTUME. COME TO DINE. COME TO DANCE."

A costume! Food! Music! It was just like Ambrose's dream come to life!

"COME."

But what to do? Ambrose had no costume, no idea how to get to the palace. He had only a week. What could he do?

Ambrose read and re-read the invitation. He pinched himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming. The pain was real. The invitation was real. The party was real. Ambrose was no longer alone!

He thought long and hard about the problem of how to reach the palace, stopping every few minutes to read the invitation again. When he finally, finally went to bed late that night he dreamed of the palace, dreamed of the masquerade ball, dreamed of the costumes, dreamed of the musicians, dreamed of the royal court and of a king resplendent in yellow robes.

* * *

When he woke up in the morning, he remembered all of those so-sweet dreams. He remembered the invitation and grabbed it and re-read it once more to make sure it was real.

Finally, he remembered one more dream from the previous night. In that dream he was flying over the dim, dark lake, but the waters of the lake were of mist rather than water. He was aboard a great flying craft, an open disc that was surrounded by four great bronze heads, which belched steam into the sky to lift him up. In the center of the disc was a great mechanism of clockwork gears and pistons, which supported eleven globes of brass. One globe lay still at the center, while the other ten (of varying sizes, and some with rings about them) moved around the center globe in elliptical orbits of different speeds. This massive craft, this amazing flying orrery, filled Ambrose's mind and right then and there he resolved to create this vehicle, the vehicle that would carry him over the waters of the lake and land him before the beautiful palace of so many sweet, dear dreams.

Ambrose looked around his workshop and then immediately got busy. He would have to scour the city for all the materials he would need, and this would take all day; he invariably could find whatever he needed for his tinkering projects, but it could take quite a while for the city to reveal such materials to him. Undaunted, he set out at once, leaving some of his creations unrepaired, others unpolished, and the rest ignored: he had other things to do on this, the first real day of all the days he had spent in the city.

Street after street fell before him as he walked and examined and poked and peered. In an alleyway he found a sizable quantity of metal sheets, and with some concentration he caused a door to appear in the wall that led directly to his workroom (which saved rather a lot of time and effort!). In the basement of a tall, tall tower he located many great hemispheres of brass. In a secret room within a silent manor he located four huge hollow heads also of brass, their faces identical to that of the

clockwork child who had brought him the message. These would serve as housings for the bellows that would make the great craft fly.

But something was missing. There had to be a central mechanism which would drive the whole orrery, which would spin the globes about this way and that, which would pump the steam and work the gears and make the whole craft take flight. He couldn't even begin to conceive of such a thing; it would take him ages to construct such a marvel!

With this on his mind, Ambrose wandered to and fro, desperate and agitated. Such a work, such a marvel--he couldn't just conjure it up! Thinking on this problem, he entered a square that, like the rest of the city, was new to him. In the middle of the square was a great, silent merry-go-round.

Ambrose stood still, stopped in his tracks. He had never seen anything like this in the city. A merry-go-round! It was all metal-- brass and copper--but gaily painted over much of its surface. A gaggle of prancing horses surrounded the central spindle, together with great regal wagons and sleds. The merry-go-round gleamed like nothing he had ever seen, and in an instant Ambrose knew he had found the heart of his orrery. He took a step forward, eager to begin taking the merry-go-round apart and rebuilding it to suit his needs, when he realized he wasn't alone.

The clockwork child was back. She was motionless, at the entrance of another avenue, her porcelain face staring at the merry-go-round.

Ambrose stared at the tiny creature and pondered. How many times had she come here, to stare at the merry-go-round and its mighty steeds, its fine carriages and ornate ornamentation? Always, he knew, it had been still and quiet.

The clockwork child clicked and rocked, and her face turned 'round to look at Ambrose. A great red, glistening tear rolled down her cheek and splashed on the cobblestones, where a pool of red liquid lay.

Of such as this are clockwork dreams and clockwork fancies made,

Ambrose thought.

He strode forward purposefully, onto the great disc of the merry-go-round and up to the central spindle. There he poked and prodded for a few scant moments while the clockwork child edged occasionally closer, a few feet at a time, curious and dripping.

All at once a great whine and squeal came from the merry-go-round, and a hideous piping ensued. The disc began to move, the horses began to shift up and down, and then the sound sped up and became a wonderful, great cacophony of noise.

It was music! Ambrose knew this--he who had not heard music in all his life here in this city. It was music, and it was beautiful.

The great wheel spun around and around, and the horses moved up and down and up and down, and the little clockwork child--who had rolled up a ramp and onto the platform of the merry-go-round before Ambrose had started it up--rolled and clacked and wobbled amongst the horses and carriages, delighted, her little arms spinning in circles as her head spun this way and that trying to take it all in. Her big wheel spun and her little wheel spun and she raced to and fro as the music rampaged madly and sweetly through the air and the merry-go-round spun and spun.

For several minutes it spun so, and then began to run down. The music slowed again, the horses lost their great, fiery speed, and soon the whole merry-go-round came to a halt.

The clockwork child rolled off the platform and into the square as Ambrose watched, transfixed. As she passed into one of the great avenues that would shortly swallow her up in its immense and ever-changing scenery, the clockwork child's head spun round on its stalk and looked back at Ambrose, and it kept looking back at him, her face a mask, until she had passed from sight.

Ambrose looked after her passing for a full minute, and then set to work. There was much to be done.

* * *

There seemed no point in moving the massive parts of the merry-go-round to his workshop, so Ambrose moved his workshop to the great square. This frightened him, for he knew that the city was always changing and that the square might one day vanish, never to be found. So Ambrose thought of the square constantly. He pictured it in his mind, he described it to himself aloud, he constantly talked of the square and what it was like. Ambrose had learned one thing about the city: he could make it behave a little, if he tried to. The more he thought about the square, and the more he could see the square in his mind, the better the chance that it would still be there when next he went.

This wasn't hard, for Ambrose was in the square almost all the time. He brought his tools, and the sheets of metal, and the great bronze heads, and the eleven globes. He slept there, he worked there, and slowly but surely the flying orrery of his dreams came together.

By the end of the fifth day after he received the invitation, Ambrose was finished.

The orrery was a wonder to behold. Ambrose gazed at it with pride. It was about the size of the merry-go-round, but in place of the colorful roof and all the prancing horses and noble carriages there were a set of brass globes mounted on sturdy metal arms. The arms joined at the center, where Ambrose had tinkered up an elaborate set of gears and cogs that moved the globes around in great ovals. He had placed a strong magnet within each globe, and as the globes whirled about, the magnets would whirl about and the patterns of their movement created a force that pushed the orrery off the ground. Ambrose had planned it all out very carefully, though he could not say how he knew it would work. Yet work it did. With the orrery off the ground, Ambrose would work the bellows on the massive heads to push the orrery this way and that. It was, Ambrose reflected, not the most efficient of machines, nor the easiest to operate. But it was, he believed, quite a fine thing nonetheless.

The masquerade was tomorrow night. Ambrose went to sleep that evening, lying on the platform of his amazing orrery, and though come morning he could not recall his dreams, he knew them to be glad ones.

* * *

The following morning, Ambrose got up and realized that he didn't have a costume for the masquerade. That simply wouldn't do! He could hardly arrive at the fine castle across the rolling water dressed like any ordinary inhabitant of Carcosa. Ambrose decided to return to his home and put something together.

But his home was no longer there.

Ambrose walked the streets, trying to remember what his workshop looked like, trying to find the door that would lead him in. He used to know it so well; it was where he had spent most of his life in Carcosa. Yet it simply would not reveal itself to him. His step quickened, his brow furrowed, and he went from place to place trying to find his home, his workshop. Every time he saw a familiar door, it led someplace unfamiliar. Every time he heard the clatter-clack of all his clockwork tinkering, he could not find the source of the sound. Every time he recognized a corner, a street lamp, a crack in a wall, they brought him no closer to his home.

It was gone, lost. Ambrose cursed himself for being such a fool. In his driving need to construct the orrery and cross the lake to the palace, he had lost touch with his home and now the city had taken it away from him. Ambrose beat his fist against a wall, breathing heavily, and felt like a tired old fool of a man with no home.

Finally, he gave up. His home was gone--so be it. He stood on the threshold of a new life, perhaps a new home, in the distant palace. He might not ever return, anyway. The people of the palace might be so glad to see him, and so admiring of his amazing orrery, that they would take him as their court tinker and he could make wonderful things for wonderful people for the rest of his life. Ambrose told himself this must

be the case. He told himself that the home he had lost was no true home, anyway--it was just a part of the city he had borrowed for a while, and now the city had taken it back. He stared off down the street at the churning water of the lake and swore, then and there, that he would never return to Carcosa. His destiny lay on the far shore.

Within a few minutes, Ambrose was back in the great square. He began rummaging through all of the parts he had taken off the merry-go-round, picking up this piece and that and wondering what could be made of it. Finally, he decided on his costume. He would go as a minotaur, who (he seemed to recall from some half-forgotten tale) was the master of a labyrinth. Carcosa was a labyrinth, and Ambrose fancied that in leaving it behind, he would become its master. A minotaur he would be.

He took the red velvet curtains he had taken down from the center shaft of the merry-go-round, and fashioned them into a beautiful red cloak. He took parts from the horses and the carriages and the great pile of cogs and junk he hadn't used, and built himself a mask in the form of a minotaur's head. It was no ordinary mask, of course; Ambrose wanted to make a grand impression on the grand folk of the palace, and so he decided his mask had to be something special. He took a horse's painted iron head and used it for the face, separating it into two halves and adding portions from other horses to widen the whole thing. He took the horns from a pair of gilt unicorns and attached them to the top. He took a great many ornaments--metal roses and fine brass fittings--and worked them into the mask so that they would spin and move and draw the eye. He tinkered with the ears so that they would turn this way and that, and wove tassels from the curtains into a fine mane that would toss to and fro as he walked. All of this came together--like clockwork--until he had a beautiful minotaur mask that was always in motion. Ambrose put on the cloak and mask and then looked into one of the cameo mirrors mounted in the side of a discarded merry-go-round carriage and admired his handiwork. It was a beautiful costume, probably the best anyone in the palace would ever have seen. Behind the mask, Ambrose smiled in contentment. He had done well.

* * *

By then, it was late afternoon and the masquerade would be just a few hours away. Ambrose knew it would take him a while to cross the lake, and so he decided it was time to start. He stepped on the platform and started the orrery, admiring the way it came to life under his touch. The orrery had just started to lift off the ground, when he heard a sound from the square. He looked around, and saw that the little clockwork child had returned.

She stood, wobbly, at an entrance to the square. She stared at the orrery, at Ambrose, and then spun in happy circles. Then she raced up to the edge of the platform and looked up at Ambrose.

Ambrose looked down at her. She wanted to come with him, it seemed. Well, she had brought the invitation--why not? Perhaps she had received an invitation of her own. Ambrose had removed the ramp that once led up to the merry-go-round, so he leaned down and picked up the little clacking girl and set her down on the platform. She spun around again, once, twice, three times, and then stopped and looked at him once more. Though the features of her porcelain face did not change, Ambrose thought that she must be smiling.

Returning his attention to the controls, Ambrose increased the speed at which the great armature drove the globes around and around. The platform lifted higher, and then higher still, and as it rose Ambrose and the clockwork child could see more of the great city than they ever had before.

It was a marvel. From their vantage point--two stories above the ground, then four, then twelve, then above most of the rooftops--the city was a beautiful creature. The streets of the city extended out like welcoming arms, each with a gentle curve, embracing the buildings that stood upon them. Ambrose could not see where the city ended. It simply seemed to go on to the horizon, and perhaps beyond. Most wonderful of all, it was always changing. Ambrose would look one way, then another, and then

back--and things would be different. Buildings would be taller, or shorter. There would be more windows, then fewer. Streets would widen and narrow, or vanish altogether to be replaced by a fine park or a monstrous cathedral. The city would never change before Ambrose's eyes, but only when he was looking elsewhere. It seemed to Ambrose that the city was alive, and always new.

They rose higher, and higher, till Ambrose felt it was high enough and stabilized the speed at which the orrery spun. Then he turned and looked at the lake. It was not far off, but the distance to the palace was impossible to guess. Hoping for the best, Ambrose began to work the bellows on two of the great heads and the orrery began to drift off over the water.

As Ambrose went about his work, the clockwork child was ever at his side. She would race from one spot to the next, looking at everything, her little arms spinning about as she saw each new thing. She watched Ambrose intently, seeing everything he did, sometimes cocking her head to this side or that as she puzzled out what he was doing. Ambrose did not speak, thinking that his words would be lost on her. But he was happy she was here--somehow, she had a connection to the place they were going. Had she come from the palace? Had someone from the palace crossed the lake and chosen this little girl as a messenger? Ambrose couldn't guess. But she was real and new to him, and new things were scarce in Carcosa.

* * *

The orrery flew on, across the water. Behind them, Carcosa quickly receded over the horizon, yet the palace seemed no closer. A fog had spread across the water, and clouds had filled the sky above. Ambrose could scarcely see the palace, in fact. It was visible only at rare moments, at a break in the mist. Yet it was always straight ahead, for Ambrose held his course steady.

There were sounds coming from the water. They did not come often, but

there was no mistaking them. Ambrose could hear deep rolling calls from something beneath the water, and occasional squawks and splashes as if from some diving bird. Not once did he see anything, above or below. But Ambrose watched intently, hoping for a glimpse.

In watching, Ambrose came to realize that something was happening. The fog below was getting thicker and rising closer to the orrery. The clouds above seemed to be growing, or sinking, so that they were closer, too. Before too much longer, the orrery was completely engulfed in mist.

Ambrose paced around the platform, the clockwork child at his heels. The mist worried him. He couldn't see more than a few yards past the edge of the platform now, and though he felt sure he had maintained his course, he could not be positive that they were still heading for the palace. It had seemed so far off that even a slight change in direction could surely put them in the wrong. But there was nothing to be done--the mist was all around them, and he could not clear it. He had to hope for the best.

Then something else happened. The orrery began to slow down. Unaccountably, the great armature was losing speed and the great whirling globes were doing the same. Ambrose raced to his machinery, and opened the throttle. It didn't change a thing. Within moments, he felt butterflies in his stomach and knew that the orrery was dropping, very quickly, towards the water.

In a panic, Ambrose worked the bellows faster, trying to propel them (hopefully) closer to the palace. He raced back and forth between the bellows and the armature, torn between gaining speed and restoring altitude. But the globes were now moving very slowly, and within moments they stopped altogether. The orrery was dropping fast now, almost plummeting, and the wind roared past the edges of the platform. It got inside the great brass heads so that they howled with a heart-wrenching sadness. Ambrose cried himself, screaming in frustration at the controls that simply would not respond. He was doomed--he would

strike the water and drown. All would be lost. He would not reach the palace, would not join the masquerade. Even now, perhaps a royal attendant was crossing Ambrose's name off the guest list.

But the clockwork child was not concerned. She had stopped following Ambrose, and now simply wandered about to and fro. She would go to the edge of the platform and look off into the mist, or wander over to watch the pumping bellows behind a brass head. She showed no excitement, no uncertainty, no fear. Ambrose stared at her, stopped in his tracks by the realization that the child was at peace.

All at once, they hit the water--but the water was not there. Instead, it had been replaced by still more mist. But this mist was a rich gray, and seemed much more solid than the wispy clouds they had been flying through. Yet Ambrose was sure this was the water. They were in the lake, and the lake was mist, and they were not dead.

The noise of the wind stopped, and the brass heads ceased their airy lament. It was calm and quiet, as if they were underwater. Ambrose looked about, confused.

Then he heard it. A great bellow, almost a wail, but impossibly loud and rich. The lake-mist that enveloped them resonated with it, it echoed within the hollow heads, it caused the globes to vibrate. There was something in the lake with them, something large, and by the sound of it the thing was coming this way.

A word popped into Ambrose's head, a word he hadn't thought of or heard for as long as he'd been in Carcosa. The word was "whale" and somehow he knew that was what he was hearing. It was the song of a whale, powerful and mournful. Listening to it, Ambrose almost wanted to cry--it was the saddest thing he'd ever heard.

Before he could react, it was upon them. A mammoth dark shape appeared in the mist nearby, moving swiftly. The orrery was knocked back as the lake-mist roiled about at the whale's passing. The beast was huge, almost formless in the dark, and it moved past them as if it didn't

even know they were there. The sight was beautiful, and awesome. For several moments as the whale passed by, it seemed that there would be no end to it--but all at once, there was the tail. It rose and fell slowly, like the tide, propelling the great beast along. As it passed them, the turbulence of its wake knocked the orrery all about. Ambrose fell and grabbed onto the railing at the edge of the platform, his legs dangling off the edge. He heard a frightened clacking and the clockwork child came sliding down the incline. Ambrose reached out and grabbed the child's arm just before she went off the edge. He pulled the heavy little metal girl close to him, and held on to her while the last of the wake rocked the craft.

As the song of the whale grew softer, it was overtaken by a hideous squawking and chirping. A flock of great leathery bird-things with horrible suckers for mouths emerged from the mist, flapping their wings as they struggled to keep up with the whale. They were terrible to see, and Ambrose thought for sure that one or more of the things would peel off and come for them, to dine on human flesh and clockwork bone. But the beasts moved on, into the gloom, and soon only their distant cries could be heard.

The orrery, free of the turbulence, righted itself. Ambrose clambered up off the edge of the platform and set the clockwork child down. She immediately raced over to the far side, to stare off into the lake-mist and try to glimpse the whale again. But it was gone, and the flock of creatures with it. Once more, they were alone.

Ambrose quickly surveyed the orrery. Nothing seemed to be broken or damaged. Yet they were still falling, slowly, down through the lake. He looked over the edge at what lay below, and then shook his head and looked again.

There was light down there. Many lights, in fact, all clustered together and shining brightly. Something was below them, something alive and glowing. Ambrose peered closer. What could it be?

Then the orrery dropped through the bottom of the lake and into open air--but it was not lake-mist above them. Instead, as Ambrose craned his neck back to see where they had been, he saw clouds. They were in the air again, and it was clear all around them. Ambrose looked back down where he had seen the lights and then he saw their source: the palace.

It was directly below them, larger than he could have ever imagined. It was almost a city unto itself, and from every window there shone a glad luminescence. It looked like a party was going on; presumably, thought Ambrose, there was.

Suddenly the orrery began to spin again, and within moments it had reached its former graceful speed. From there, the craft slowed until it descended slowly and carefully, down toward the great lawn before the entrance to the palace. Ambrose could see people down there, walking about the gardens and the paths.

People! For a moment he didn't realize what this meant. There were people there! It hadn't all been a dream! Ambrose would no longer be alone.

The orrery got closer and closer to the ground. Now Ambrose could see that the people below were gathering on the lawn, pointing up into the sky, watching his great craft descend. Hurriedly, Ambrose pulled his cloak and mask from the center of the armature and put them on. As the orrery descended the final few yards to the ground, Ambrose stood at the railing, looking tall and proud, with the clockwork child by his side.

They landed. From every side, a rush of people in beautiful costumes came forward to admire his craft. They caressed the bronze heads, admired the globes, and chattered happily about this fine thing that the minotaur-man had brought.

Two brightly-dressed guardsmen pushed through the crowd and approached Ambrose. One of them spoke--the first words anyone had said to him for as long as he could remember.

"Good evening, Ambrose. We're delighted that you could be here." Ambrose surveyed the two men, and the happy crowd around them, and the great, beautiful palace that rose up to fill his vision. Behind the mask, tears of purest joy rolled down his face and he smiled a greater smile than he ever knew he could. At his feet, the clockwork child spun in a little circle, arms bobbing up and down, jaw clacking in rhythm.

"So am I, good sirs. So am I."

* * *

Ambrose stepped down off the platform, then he turned and hefted the clockwork child down to the ground as well. The guardsmen gestured towards the entrance, and parted the crowd. Ambrose nodded gratefully to them, and then he and the clockwork child moved forward towards the grand doors and the hall beyond, a hall full of happiness and rich with life.

In moments they had entered the palace, leaving Carcosa--and this tale--behind.

FOLKS OF INNSMOUTH: GILMAN HOUSE CLERK

Franklyn Searight

Naw! Innsmouth is a nice town! Sure, it is!
Though I'm not native - didn't grow up here -
Still, I can swear those rumors are untrue;
There's nothin' that outsiders need to fear.

Oh, sure, some mighty scary looking gents
Stop by to spend the day or night with us.
And, yes, some harmless guest have disappeared;
But there's no need to make an awful fuss.

Just stay inside at night - don't prowl the streets.
Don't talk to folks who have a froggy stare.
Just be polite and mind your business, sir.
Stop by again to visit - if you dare !

THE TRANSITION OF ABDUL ALHAZRED

Transcribed from the Dee Editon
by Robert M. Price

Hear then, o my disciples, mine own testimony to the true events, much rumoured and also much falsified, touching my departure from this mortal sphere into the Depths of Chaos and Truth.

It came to pass that in the ninety-eighth year of the Hegira that I betook myself upon the lonely path of the Black Hajj unto thrice-damned Chorazin, that place distinguished by prophecy as the natal site of Dejjet, the Son of Perdition that shall come in the Latter Days before the Trump of Jibreel shall sound to waken those that sleep, when even death shall perish. There I journeyed alone to venerate the last standing shrines and chapels of the interdicted Gods of the Arabs, even Yaghuth, Wad, Sowa, Ya'uq, Gog and Magog, all of them cheated of their due reverence by the Prophet of ill fame.

Others whom I shall not name did greet me there, some of them pilgrims like myself, others sojourners who passed their days in the holiness of desolation, offering sacrifices of prayer and meditation when they could find naught else to render up. But the Gods who teeter upon the very brink of oblivion do not sneer at whatever shadow of sacrifice they be offered by the few cherishing their once-mighty names. I had in former years made the Pilgrimage more than once, and each time did I mark how the number of the Congregation of the Shadows had waned.

I spent no appreciable time choosing my humble lodgings, as, even with the sparsity of unfallen shelters, those who dwelt thereunder were fewer still. I entered upon the obeisances required for the occasion, chanting the forbidden liturgies of al-Manat and of Eblis, whose sacred words

have ceased echoing in Mecca, that great city. I proceeded to the graves of the holy martyrs, slain as they confessed the faith of Yazid and of Melek Tous. Finding a small gathering of the shrouded faithful attendant upon the ruins of the Black Mosque of Our Lord Shaitan, I sensed that they awaited my word, and I did oblige, leading them in the unhallowed litany of execration of Allah and his Prophet.

In those days, though I must needs assume the outward cloak of Moslem piety so as to conceal the truth from the prying eyes of those unworthy to know it, I had gained a fair modicum of esteem in certain select circles by reason of my far questing and mine insatiable thirst for ancient secrets by the which I thought, by some means as yet undisclosed, to restore the Old Faith of the days before the Prophet of the jealous usurper Allah, indeed before the days of men.

And it was as mendicant and pilgrim that my co-religionists received me and deferred to me. I had, as can be seen from the preceding tales, learned more of the dangers than of the glories of the strange paths I sought to tread. I had considerable yet to learn, and as yet naught to teach. And it was this path of surceaseless inquiry that had led at length to the Black Hajj of Chorazin in the days of which I now tell.

No sooner had I concluded the anathemas sacred to our rite than I began to pace my way in silence back to the hovel I had chosen as my own. Many followed me, perhaps thinking me to be in progress to some other holy place. We had entered through the tumble-down stones of an ancient gateway into what had once been a thriving bazaar and still served as the central place of paltry bartering of bare necessities between the destitute wretches who dwelt here. And straightway was I stricken by an unseen blow. As a circle of wide-eyed faces did commence to form around me, I dropped to the ground and did flail in much blazing agony. As some now say, methought I contended in vain against the superior might of an unseen Jinni who shook me like an empty wineskin. I was taken up for dead, and some took pity, securing my return, supine and oblivious, to the city of Damascus. Straightway the word was noised abroad that some Devil had devoured my soul, that

I had recapitulated the hideous screaming doom of my aged master Yakthoob. Indeed, in the years to follow the tales of master and disciple were not infrequently confounded together.

And in truth I did find myself to have quit the confines of this mortal tent. My shade did voyage upon a subterrene ocean of blackness, sure of one thing only: that I was bound for the lowest of the Eleven Scarlet Hells, where the forfeited souls of the damned do serve as morsels for the dread Yamath-Cthugha, Lord of Fire.

But that homecoming was not yet to be mine, as in the fullness of time I came to myself again, new and oddly bodied, for that presently I was much amazed to find myself resident in far stranger housing and on a far stranger pilgrimage than that upon which I had embarked unto fabled Chorazin. The feeble limbs of a man had fallen away, and mine immortal essence indwelt the ungainly form of some great cone from which sprouted twisting, serpentine appendages, like unto those of the cuttlefish. Such images and worse had I beheld oftentimes in dreams and visions under my master's guidance, and in unbidden nightmares even more. What I heard in that unknown realm I may not repeat, and much I confess I remember not, for that some secrets are not good for the fleshy minds of men to know. From some truths the soul recoils, and like oil introduced into water, the twain forever balk at mixing.

But I may say that, during my visionary journey, I found myself, even as I had in mundane Chorazin, amid a group of fellow pilgrims, minds like mine own, who had been seized up from their own times and climes and borne away hither, both to teach and to learn. For it was made plain to us that we were the guests of the men of Yith who, like us, had made their temporary abode in the snail-like bodies of the cone-things, supplanting whatever intelligences might at first have inhabited them. These they sent back to their own dying world, beyond the rim of the outermost sphere. They fain would not abide here amid the crude forms of the cone-beings forever, this mode of existence being most vexing to them, but meantime their task was to amass a great library of knowledge of all the eras of their adopted planet, for that they were able to voyage

through Time as well as through Space, and would one day choose some future aeon in which to live. To this end did they barter minds and bodies with chosen men from many ages.

While we lingered in their underground city somewhere in the unknown antipodes, transcribing the extent of our wisdoms, the Yithites in our own accustomed forms would learn of our age and leave behind selected bits of their own advanced knowledge in exchange, all the more to their own considerable advantage, since in this manner they might influence the course of future ages in directions more amenable to themselves, preparing the way for their own advent in the future world.

I hesitated not at all to share mine own deposit of esoteric learning with these fellow-seekers in the path of knowledge, though at length I came to suspect that what I inscribed in curious inks upon thin metal-leaved codices told the Yithites little if anything they did not already know or surmise from their own delvings done aforetime, albeit my knowledge, given Yakthoob's death, was perhaps the greatest among mortal men. Doubtless the volume of my record yet remains buried in that unknown city of the cone-race.

Though they likely had naught to learn from me, much did I learn, not from them, but from my fellow sojourners. Though most was forgotten during the harrowing journey back to this body of familiar flesh, as one's dreams, though vivid, flee before the morning, well do I recall certain soul-blasting secrets reaped from the captive minds of sages, savants, and shamans of divers ages and lands. Of these I did esteem most highly the acquaintances of the minds of one Vonjuns from among the German kafirs of whom Tacitus telleth, and one Prinn, disciple and slave of mine own Saracenic brethren in time to come, yea, and of the fabled mage Eibon from polar Hyperborea, whom I confess I had half-believed to be mere legend.

One day, amid a great tumult of unaccountable whistling and crashing, neither a sound easily made by the ungainly forms of the cone-shaped entities, my sojourn came to an abrupt end, my blasted consciousness

finding itself hurled dizzyingly, sickeningly back into its characteristic habitation. What the looking glass showed did most fully corroborate the tidings of the Damascenes, among whom my body had abided these eight long years! Only, as I soon was made to understand, my form had not been supine, nor my absence noticed. All alike swore that I had been feverishly engaged at a scriptorium, which they hastened to shew to me, at work on what they took up in shaking hands, a great codex, written within and without in a great number of iridescent inks. This tome I took from the hands that held it out to me, as they believed I had received it from the hands of the Old Gods Themselves while in a mantic trance. I retired to my hut, and by the light of a lamp I began to read.

The scribal hand was doubtless mine own, albeit with some unaccountable touch of unfamiliarity. And what I there did read has filled my head with clashing shrieks which do never cease to ring among the empty caverns of my soul even to this hour. Here were the unbearable truths of elder, outer entity, of the Black Aeons before the dream of sanity was first made the retreat of cringing mortals. There were many hundreds of tightly-written pages, and no correction or error that I could find anywhere among them. It was a revelation indeed, and by no means least unto myself. Here I learned of the Doom that must come at last upon all men, and here I learned equally to rejoice in it.

It must be that some of the men of Chorazin, who had not abandoned me, had heard and read these Oracles from the Pit as that entity dwelling behind my visage promulgated them. For when after many days I again arrived in that ruined city of abominations, the multitude, which I now did see had grown appreciably during the time of my visionary journey, awaited my word and hailed me with one mighty voice as Dejjat himself, the Mahdi of Yog-Sothoth.

Here is even the truth of the matter, and what follows is that portion of the revelations I have deemed fit to share. I make to reveal my mysteries to those who are worthy of my mysteries. Count the cost, I admonish thee, before that thou delvest, and mark well these lessons I have sought earnestly to teach unto thy profit in the foregoing narratives.

WHERE WALKS ISTASHA

James Ambuehl

She walks with purpose, a darkly purpose,
and many fear her tread.
In ancient circles, old as time itself,
her very name was dread.

She walked the Earth when it was newly-made,
and held sway even then,
Over creatures, long since extinct,
that came before the race of men.

For she is ancient, eons-old,
and often was her name sung,
By her Children in the Halls of Ulthar -
Praise to this Ancient One!

Her beauty is not wholesome,
like that of Lythalia, her sister,
Here is a seductive beauty, a feline grace,
and few can resist her.

Her love is a dark love, an unwholesome thing,
this Mistress of the Darkness,
Yet she knows her power, and plays upon this,
to draw men to this seductress.

She promises the love of a goddess,
power, wealth, immortality -
Who could resist such a deadly lure?

Not I, I tell you, not even thee!

But tell me: can a man love a goddess,
even one such as she?

For I do love her,
or so does my heart tell me.

Although once a good man,
a man of God, I would not hesitate,
To do by her whatever she demands,
no matter consecrate.

For murder, even that most terrible sin,
I would not falter.
To worship there in her fires of lust,
my seed upon her altar.

But I warn you now, her power spreads,
again she will hold sway.
Over beast and man alike, swift
approaches the Ancient Ones' day.

If you are of the fortunate few, who know her not
avoid her lure -
For me it is too late, to her I belong,
and it is sure,

By stream or brook, in field or cave,
on hill or vale or hollow;
Wherever the road may lie, where walks Istasha,
I, too, shall follow.

THE THING IN THE PIT

Lin Carter
(1930 - 1988)

The mythological narrative which follows is taken from the disturbing and debatable translation made by Professor Copeland three years after his return from central Asia. His brochure, *The Zanthu Tablets: A Conjectural Translation* (1916), was published at his own expense after being rejected by the academic firms which had printed his earlier, more scholarly works. Widely condemned as unsubstantiated "ravings" by his scientific colleagues, the brochure was swiftly suppressed by the authorities. The present editors make no claims for the validity of Copeland's "translation". It must be remembered that the professor returned from Asia, his health, both mental and physical, broken by the terrible privations he endured in 1913, and that he died raving in an asylum only ten years after seeing his "translation" through press. His final manuscript, *The Civilization of Mu: A Reconstruction in Light of Recent Discoveries, with a Synoptic Comparison of the R'lyeh Text and the Ponape Scripture* (circa 1917-1926), remains to this day unpublished - and unpublishable.

We have prefaced this extract from the Zanthu Tablets with a note from Copeland's own introduction.

From the Preface to the Traslation

"Upon prolonged study I became firmly convinced that my initial impressions were thoroughly accurate, and that the Tablets were indeed inscribed in an elder hieratic variant of the primal Naacal language. It is regretful that, with the death of poor, much-maligned Churchward, the last man who could have possibly attempted a decent translation of so obscure a variant was lost to the scientific community. Hoping that a chance existed that the Colonel had left a key or some manner of Naacal glossary among his papers, I hastened to contact his estate and, with time and great cooperation which I am pleased to acknowledge here, a clue to the inscriptions was indeed unearthed in his files.

"What follows, however, is correctly termed a 'conjectural' translation, and to this qualification I should perhaps add 'fragmentary' as well: for although the inscriptions are complete, my respect for the public sanity is such that I would not care to subject wholesome, healthy minds to the full depravity, the hideous blasphemies, set down by the hand of the long-dead, accursed wizard-priest of the Abomination Ythogtha, whose tomb I opened, perhaps unwisely, in 1913.

"Let it be said now and in this place, once and for all, that the matter which I have named 'the Xothic legend-cycle' - which is to say, the myth-sequence of the Xothic Triad (Ghatanothoa, Ythogtha and Zoth-Ommog) - has at its secret core a chaotic and cosmic blasphemy so appalling in its ultimate depravity and in the magnitude of its bearings upon human and prehuman evolution as to stun even the detached and dispassionate scholar."

From the Zanthu Tablets

Tablet IX, Side 2, Lines 30 through 174

The innumerable iniquities of Yaa-Thobboth, hierophant of Ghatanothoa, the Monster on the Mount, I, Zanthu, wizard and last surviving priest of Ythogtha, the Abomination in the Abyss, have endured for long with uncomplaining and stoical fortitude. But this last, supreme, and ultimate affront I could not let pass in silence, nor could I forebear from the action I will describe.

For uncountable millennia, the fortunes of my cult had languished and waned, even as, during the same intervals of time, the rise to affluence and popularity of rival cults which celebrate the vile Monstrosity that dwelleth ever atop the mysterious and untrodden heights of Yaddith-Gho had enjoyed an unbroken succession of triumphs. It was now many millennia since that legended Year of the Red Moon^[1], when the rash and impudent T'yog, high priest of the Old Ones, and votary of Shub-Niggurath the Mighty Mother, sought with ultimate futility to whelm and break as under for all time to come the power of Ghatanothoa, in which vain and perilous attempt the unfortunate T'yog came to so unthinkable and shuddersome an end that even that dread chronicle, the *Ghorl Nigraal*, did not dare whisper a single hint or slightest rumor of his fate.

It can easily be seen that the disastrous failure of the gallant, if incautious, T'yog was sufficient to overawe any other from making a similar in all the ages since the Year of the Red Moon to my own epoch, for during the cycles which have lapsed from the era of T'yog to this day, none other has tried. And the rise to power and unquestioned authority of the cult of Ghatanothoa has been loathsomely smooth and rapid.

That this was, in very large part, the doing of Imash-Mo can easily be demonstrated. For upon the horrible demise of the unfortunate T'yog, gloatfully and hastily seizing upon the moment, the infamous Imash-Mo, who was high priest of Ghatanothoa in his day, proclaimed to all the Nine Kingdoms that his loathsome and noxious divinity was thus proven supreme over all the thousand gods of primordial and everlasting Mu. And, alas, Imash-Mo had long since gained ascendancy over the weak and easily swayed Thabou, king of the province of K'naa, wherein rose the demon-possessed mountain of Yaddith-Gho; and King Thabou hastened to ratify the supremacy of Ghatanothoa even over the might of Cthulhu, the Lord of R'lyeh himself.

Lustrum by lustrum, cycle by cycle, the wealth, power, and following of the cult of Ythogtha declined thereafter, even as did all of the other of the thousand cults of primal Mu. In vain did my priestly predecessors warn that the vengeance of the affronted gods would someday smite the Nine Kingdoms of Mu, and mayhap trample all of the mighty continent beneath the green and seething waves of Ocean, as ancient prophecies reiterated was to be our eventual and transcendent Doom. But naught could avert or even retard the remorseless decline of the worship of Ythogtha.

II.

When I, in my turn, assumed the scarlet pontifical sand the brazen rod of my office, in the Year of the Whispering Shadow^[2], I swore by the Gray Ritual of Khif, by the Vooric Sign, by the Weedy Monolith, and by the might and glory of potent and terrible Ythogtha, that my god should achieve His triumph and His revenge during my pontificate.

Alas, I had reckoned without the cunning and ambition of Yaa-Thobboth! For no sooner had the brazen rod been set into my grasp and the Thirty-one Secret Rituals of Yhe been given over to my keeping, than the villainous high priest of Ghatanothoa let pass the ultimate and unforgivable affront against the dignity of my office and the splendor of my god.

For this Yaa-Thobboth had at length prevailed upon the palsied and enfeebled Shommog, monarch over K'naa, and a writ was proclaimed which set under ban and interdict any other form of worship of the Great Old Ones than that approved by the followers of Ghatanothoa. The copper gates of the temple of Shub-Niggurath were sealed; the greenly lit adyta of Cthulhu were deserted; and temple by temple, across the breadth of the Nine Kingdoms, the supreme power of Ghatanothoa the Monster on the Mount was proclaimed

Now King Shommog was regnant over the province of K'naa while I and my few acolytes dwelt in the land of G'thuu to the north, beyond the River of Worms and the Carven Basalt Cliffs and the Catacombs of Thul. But great had the authority of K'naa grown in the eleven thousand years since the reign of King Thabou and the hierophancy of Imash-Mo, and in these moon-dim, latter days, the power of my land of G'thuu was shrunken and seldom did mine own monarch, the degenerate Nuggog-ying, dare oppose the will or whim of the King of K'naa. Thus it seemed inevitable that the last vestige of reverence for the Abomination in the Abyss should gutter and die, and in the very pontificate of one who had sworn by dread and terrible oaths to restore Him to the heights of His former and tremendous might.

III.

In despair, I withdrew to the crumbling ruins of my palace which stood of old upon the very brink of that profound and shadowy chasm, the Abyss of Yhe, where in the victorious Elder Gods had hurled the great Ythogtha and had sealed Him there in forever under the potency of the Elder Sign and where into this day the unbreakable bonds of psychic force imprison Him, even as foul Ghatanothoa is pent and imprisoned in that immemorial and cyclopean citadel atop Mount Yaddith-Gho, and Great Cthulhu slumbers in his Sunken City on the ocean-whelmed and aeon-lost Black Island, and terrible Zoth-Ommog lies chained amid the Deep beyond the Isle of the Sacred Stone Cities.^[3]

Even in the uttermost nadir of my despair, it were unwise for me to

neglect the awful duties of my sacerdotal office and thus I turned from a dreary contemplation of this most dire of all the thousand iniquities of the infamous Yaa-Thobboth to that scrutiny and study of the *Thirty-one Rituals* demanded of my office. This precious document, of which the Earth affords no single other copy^[4], and which dates from the most extreme and legended antiquity, was indited by the very hand of Niggoun-Zhog, the First Prophet, himself, in the dim aeons before the Old Ones had yet dreamt of creating man. The Secret Rituals themselves were inscribed in fiery and metallic inks upon leaves of parchment fashioned from pthagon membrane, and bound between twin and carven and gem-studded plates of unthinkably rare and precious *lagh* metal brought hither from dark Yuggoth where it rolls upon the Rim in the most remote of terrestrial aeons by the shadowy Elder Ones. My seething brain a rolling chaos of incoherent images, I perused one by one the *Thirty-one Secret Rituals of Yhe*, and in the last, most potent and terrific of them all, I found the answer to my dilemma.

For that Thirty-first Ritual contained the dread and portentous formula which is called "The Key That Openeth the Door to Yhe", and which the primal and elder Prophet warns is not to be spoken aloud save in the final extremity of ultimate Doom.

Therein, in my madness and desperation, I found the answer for which I sought -*aii, n'ghaa xuthoggon R'lyeh! la Ythogtha!* A million generations yet unborn shall curse my name!

IV.

And thus was I resolved to open the Door to Yhe, by which term is meant to render null the strictures of the Elder Sign and to release the Primal One, the Abomination in the Abyss, from the chains of psychic force which have imprisoned Him in the depths of the great Chasm for innumerable aeons.

To set free Ythogtha from His Abyss would be at a single stroke to render Him the most awesomely powerful of all the thousand gods of

antique Mu, and to thus elevate myself, as His hierophant and prophet, as the supreme and most potent priest in all of the Nine Kingdoms.

The ambitions of Yaa-Thobboth would thus be ground into the dust before my feet; the too easily dominated King Shommog would in a breath be divested of all authority, to the elevation of mine own monarch, Nuggog-ying; the wealth and might of the province of K'naa would drain away like shallow mud before the sucking tides, and my own realm of G'thuu would achieve ultimate prominence over the kingdoms of Mu. What man dares condemn me, if, in the last extremity of my need, I dared set my hand against the tremendous decree of the Elder Gods themselves!

Thus I went down the Hidden Stair to the ultimate and most secret crypt, burrowed deep into the bowels of the planet beneath the age-crumbling foundations of my palace, and there I caused my mute Rmoahal slaves to open the ponderous trapdoor, one single massy slab of hewn and polished onyx, revealing a black depth from which blew ever a chill and noxious wind.

And, steeling my soul, I called upon the power of the Xothic Key, and summoned slithering from his black and noisome burrows the Father of Worms himself, even undying and putrescent Ubb, leader and progenitor of the dreaded Yuggya - the loathly and prehuman servitors of my god, who squirm and slither in the slime about His feet.

Like a great, glistening mass of putrid whitish jelly was Father Ubb, and his squat and quivering trunk supported naught but a swollen and rounded head wherein drooled and quivered ever a pink-rimmed, obscene orifice lined with triple rows of adamantine fangs. Now the Yuggya serve my lord Ythogtha and His Brother, Zoth-Ommog, even as the Deep Ones serve Cthulhu and the Tcho-Tchos their lords, Zhar and Lloigor; and as the Flame-Creatures strive ever to free Cthugha and the Serpentmen of Valusia sought to unchain their lord, Yig, so do the Yuggya tirelessly gnaw at the bonds that hold Ythogtha and Zoth-Ommog.

Emerging at length pale and shaken from my converse with Father Ubb, whose unholy vileness and stench is even that of Abhoth Itself, I gained the upper air with relief. But I had won the aid of the Burrowers Beneath to my great endeavor, and together we swore to open the Door to Yhe, though we incur the wrath of the Elder Gods upon remote and rubescent Glyu-Vho!^[5]

I chose the Day of the Writhing of the Aurora as most efficacious for my terrific endeavor; and thence to the brink of the mighty Abyss of Yhe went I forth, with my few frightened acolytes in my train, and in the Hour of the Singing of the Green Vapor I stood upon the cliffs overlooking the profound and gloom-veiled depths of the chasm and made the Scarlet Sacrifice while behind me arose the wailing chorus of my acolytes in the uncouth and alien rhythms of the Yuggya Chants.

I performed the Red Ablution; I brandished the Xothic Key, I traced upon the trembling air in characters of living and supernal fire the Hieroglyphs of Yrr; I performed the Quarr Exorcism; I called upon the Dholes in aeon-forgotten Aklo; I employed the lore of the Forbidden Litany; I summoned the Xlath Entities from beyond the extraspatial region of Asymmetrical Etheric Polarity.

I adored the Black Flame in a manner which makes my soul shrink and shudder within me to this hour; I called upon all of the gods of archaic Mu - upon the Great Ones (saving only the noxious and tyrannical Ghatanothoa), and upon the Lesser Ones, upon Yig the Serpent-Father, and shadowy Nug, and Yeb of the Whispering Mists, upon Iod the Shining Hunter, and Vorvadoss of Bel-Yarnak, the Troubler of the Sands - and upon Him Who Is To Come, and upon Father Dagon and Mother Hydra, who rule the Deep Ones who are His servants in the green sea.

And I uttered in a great voice The Name Which Is Not Ever To Be Uttered Aloud...

Above me the stars trembled and burned pale as waxen tapers in an icy

and miasmic draught...all save for the scarlet burning eye of Glyu-Vho, which blazed more brightly than before.

Beneath my heel, the Earth shook with tremors; and from the dimly lit west, where titanic mountains march the breadth of Mu, deep subterranean thunders mumbled and cold black craters burst redly into flame, filling angry heaven with seething smoke.

My acolytes huddled before me, white faces hidden in shaking hands. An there was a great silence upon the Earth for seven breaths of time.

V.

And then my heart leapt up within me for horrid and blasphemous joy, for Lo! I had released the first of the sevn bonds that had, from the immemorial depths of forgotten time, held prisoner the Abomination in the Abyss.

And He lifted Himself above the brink of the vast chasm of Yhe and gazed down upon His arch-hierophant.

Very terrible was Ythogtha to the sight of men, and more huge than my mind could scarcely accept.

Like a black glistening moon He rose above the brink, a gigantic hemisphere of quaking slime, vaster than any mountain. Faceless and neckless was He, save that from His front a terrific beak thrust forth. Cruel and terrible and curved was this beak of blackest adamant, and it measured many thousands of paces in its length.

And then, half a league further along the brink of the chasm, a second hemispheric, black, glistening, beaked head rose into sight - and another! - and then yet a fourth mountainous and colossal beaked head rose above the lip of the Abyss!

And then it was true terror smote me to the heart, for I saw and knew my lord in His awfulness ...and we trembling mortals were dwarfed by

Him, like motes before the ponderous *yakith* lizard were we...and, suddenly, horribly, I knew what I had done.

The acolyte huddled at my feet knew in the same instant, and squealed shockingly, and wallowed in squalid and gutless terror, wriggling from before the altar of the Abomination... to flee, staggering and stumbling, white to the lips, with wide, mad, staring eyes that burned with pale fire like sick moons... and I, too, quailed to the depths of my being, and turned on palsied and trembling limbs, hurling from me with sudden horror the loathsome volume of the Rituals, which fell in to the Abyss from which ultimate and mind-blasting Nightmare had but part-way emerged... and Iran -ran -while the Earth shook and great crevices opened to split the land as under... ran, while mountain after mountain erupted in flame and thunder, and the sea boiled madly, and a great terrible shaft of unearthly light burned down the star-gulfs from distant and blazing Glyu-Vho... ran, even as down that terrific star-beam descended, from the remote star that flamed like a wrathful and revenging Eye athwart the smoke-veiled and volcano-shaken west, terrible great Things like terrific Towers of Flame... which I knew to be either the Elder Gods or Their servants... while sky-tall and burning Towers swept the Abyss with their lightnings -and I fled through the gates of Yu-Haddoth, where dwelleth my king, but which lay now in smoking ruin, shaken by the great tremors of the Earth -and I scourged the panic-stricken multitudes before me -*who knew not the true nature of the monstrous and inconceivable Thing I had almost freed*- drove them shrieking into the vidya vahans, the ancient sky chariots of elder and doom-fraught Mu... while the ground shook and the towers fell and mountain after mountain erupted in thunderous flames... and we fled through the storm-torn skies and across the wind-lashed waves... fled all that unending night of flame and doom and chaos, while behind our sky-borne keels immemorial and terror-haunted Mu crumbled under the mighty waves that beat in from the angry sea, and broke apart, shaken to its unstable core by the convulsions of outraged nature, lashed by starry fires of the Elder Gods... on we flew at length into a distant land near the Hidden Gates of elder Shamballah itself... but mere distance cannot erase from my terror-frozen brain the ultimate glimpse of nethermost

Hell that shook my soul when I saw... and knew... that vast and beaked
and mountainous Head of the Thing in the Pit... *that awful and aeon-*
cursed Thing whose unthinkably prodigious FINGERTIPS I had seen...



Translators Notes:

[1] Von Junzt, in his *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (XXI,307) estimates this date as B.C. 173,148.

[2] Evidence in the *Ponape Scripture* (particularly the astronomical data in Versicle 9759) suggests this date may be equivalent to roughly B.C.161,844; von Junzt does not include any reference to this period, as his commentary breaks off several millennia earlier.

[3] The cryptic *Ponape Scripture* says that Ghatanotha, Ythogtha, and Zoth-Ommog, are, "*the Sons of the mighty Cthulhu, Lord of the watery abyss and dread and awful Potentate of drowned R'lyeh.*" While neither the *Scripture* nor any other text of the Elder Lore known to me records the planet wherefrom Cthulhu descended to this world, the *Scripture* says of the origin of his three sons: "*the Spawn of Cthulhu came down from remote and ultratelluric Xoth, the dim green double sun that glitters like a demoic eye in the blacknesse sbeyond Abbith, to whelm and reign over the steaming fens and bubblings limepits of the dawn eons of this Earth, and it was in primordial and shadowy Muthat They were great.*" Von Junzt (XXi, 29-a) cannot identify Xoth save to say that it lies in the same star cluster as Zoath, Abbith and Ymar. The above reference to the "*Isle of the Sacred Stone Cities*" and the "*Deep that lies off its shores*", together with geographical data hinted at earlier in the *Zanthu Tablets*, enables me to identify tentatively the place whereat Zoth-Ommog the Dweller in the Deeps lies imprisoned as a submarine chasm off Ponape.

[4] The hierophant Zanthu is in error here, for the surviving fragments of the Susran myth cycle list a copy of the *The Yhe Rituals from Elder Mu* as among the necromantic tomes in the library of the great magician Malygris, according to the inventory recorded by the sorceror Nygron, and an incredibly ancient copy of the *Rituals* was in the possession of

the Saracen wizard Yakthoob, Alhazred's mentor, according to the Irem chapter of the *Necronomicon* (Narrative II). A copy, perhaps the same Yakthoobic redaction, is rumoured to have been found in a sealed tomb in Egypt about 1903.

^[5] In an often-quoted passage of the *Necronomicon*, Alhazred identifies this name, which is primal Naacal, as that of the star known to Arabic astronomers of his days as *Ibt-al Janzah*, which is to say, Betelgeuse.

THE OUTSIDER

James Ambuehl

I. Vix'ni-Aldru

In the blackest depths of space
In the voids unknown to man,
Science strove to take its place,
The experiments began.

The mystery, a black hole -
To scan its depths their hope.
Vix'ni-Aldru, aeons-old,
On this they trained their 'scope.

II. T'halu

They saw it here in the glass,
Looming in immensity.
That which brought their doom, alas,
A dead and nameless city.

But no - not quite dead - not yet,
For beyond its great walls there,
Beneath it spires of jet
Crawled horrors born of nightmare!

III. The Voorlak

Shapeless, yet not without form

Those inhabitants did be.
Lizard-like, yet like a worm,
Forms born of insanity.

Before an eldritch altar
The nightmare dwellers did kneel.
Their chanting did not falter
As they turned a monstrous wheel.

IV. Haiogh-Yai

The wheel, it seemed, was a lock;
The unknown chanting a key.
And though they took no such stock
In things, more they had to see.

They gazed above the city -
Madness they were on the verge -
Then gibbering fools to pity -
As from the door IT did emerge!

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Table of Contents

THE LOOKING GLASS

I

II. Something in Glass

III. The Servant of Quachil Utaus

IV. Reflections of Dust and Death

AT DEATH'S DOOR, DREAMING

Prologue: An Uncredited Extract...

I. A Story Presents itself

II. Something Concrete

III. A Probable Cause for Regret

IV. Openings

V. Epilogue

DREAM-SENDINGS

TO THE DANCING TREE

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO CTHULHU

AMBROSE

FOLKS OF INNSMOUTH: GILMAN HOUSE CLERK

THE TRANSITION OF ABDUL ALHAZRED

WHERE WALKS ISTASHA

THE THING IN THE PIT

THE OUTSIDER

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